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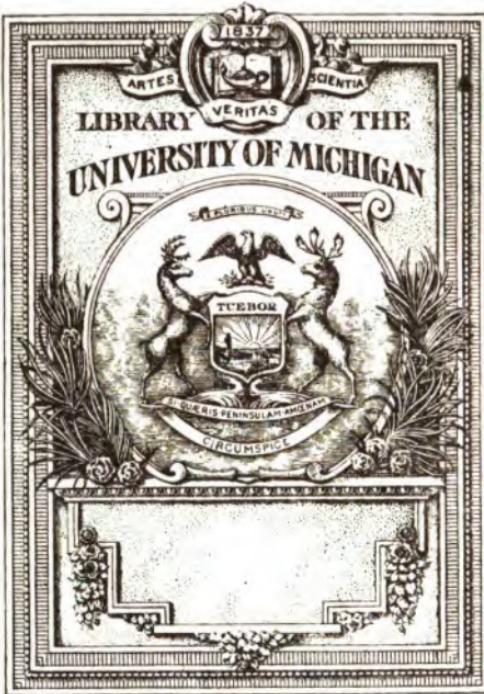
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A VAGABOND'S HONOR

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A Romance

BY

ERNEST DE LANCEY PIERSON

AUTHOR OF "A SLAVE OF CIRCUMSTANCES," "THE SHADOW
OF THE BARS," "THE BLACK BALL," ETC.

CHICAGO, NEW YORK, AND SAN FRANCISCO

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A Warm Welcome,	7
II. My Dream Comes True,	19
III. The Lost Man,	40
IV. Was it a Warning?	61
V. The Fourth Story Back,	85
VI. Almost a Confession,	110
VII. Through the Dark,	130
VIII. Two Midnight Calls,	140
IX. A Narrow Escape,	165
X. Tantalus,	177
XI. Good-bye, Dear Heart,	192
XII. An End and a Beginning,	205

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A VAGABOND'S HONOR.

CHAPTER I.

A WARM WELCOME.

I DARE say you are familiar with the fashionable suburb, Arcadia Park, with its two long avenues, where the landscape-gardener and the architect have struggled for pre-eminence. Here no common stores are to be seen ; and in the back yards the clothes-line, with its vulgarian banners, never offends the æsthetic eye. The flowering parterres are unharrowed by the feet of plebeian fowls, and the only loafers in their Eden are cats of the sleekest and dogs of the meekest and most amiable characteristics. The houses and flower-beds and hedges are so clean and new that you might imagine you were before the stage-setting of a comic opera, and that presently a chorus of village maidens would

appear in flowered petticoats and dance around a May-pole garlanded with paper flowers. At the intersection of the two streets stands a rock that would look picturesque in the green covering of vines, if it were not burdened just now by a rakish-looking young man in a loud check suit, puffing a rank cigar. His hat is tilted on the back of his head, exposing a white forehead and a pair of restless blue eyes. His face is not improved by the sulky expression it wears just now, but in pleasanter moods it might be considered handsome.

With this brief description, I will introduce myself : George Heywood ; age, twenty-five ; profession, variable ; resident of—no place in particular. That is all I can tell you about myself just now.

I am sitting on this rock, and I am smoking. As I smoke, I look over the hedge. A young Arcadian has just returned from his day's work in the city. He is embracing a young woman in blue and white, who meets him at the edge of the porch, and whom I take to be his wife.

Something very fluffy and round and white,

probably a child, is rolling around at their feet uttering strange gurgling noises that seem to please this young man hugely.

Then the two big fools and the fools' offspring go stumbling into the house together, laughing and chattering just as if they had not seen each other for years, when this sort of performance is gone through with six days in a week, and sometimes seven.

No wonder I throw away my cigar, with an angry exclamation. Why is it that the sight of this foolish little family makes me feel sulky and out of patience ?

It cannot be possible that, after knocking about the continent, and going it systematically early and late these many years, I envy that young man his wife, his home, and even his noisy child !

Absturd ! Of course not !

It's just the feeling that always takes hold of me when I arrive in a new place. It soon wears off when I get used to my surroundings. I've not been in New York or this neighborhood for years ; and not knowing anyone in the city that I care to meet, this old longing for a home takes possession of me.

It is my opinion that those two young people started their hugging on purpose to make the well-dressed ruffian on the rock feel bad. What else could be the reason? Surely their kisses wouldn't have become cold if they had waited until they were in the house.

Now there's a piano starting up its everlasting tinkle-tankle, and now that woman's singing something about home, just as if she wasn't used to such a luxury and wanted everybody to know that she had one.

I think I'll get out of here before they have me snivelling like a love-sick school-girl.

Lights are beginning to flash through the dusk from crooked dormer windows, and I can hear the rattle of knives and forks and the chink of glass and china. I wonder what they are going to have for supper! 'Um! it smells like something good; lacks that damp, mouldy odor you catch in a hotel dining-room. Why didn't they ask me in to have a bite, confound 'em?

I can look in on the library. Young husband toasting his toes by a crackling fire and

reading the evening paper. Booh ! I forgot it was getting so cold out here. There's his wife bringing him his slippers, and grinning like a tooth-powder trade-mark. I wish !—yes, I wish—(what's the use of lying to myself ?)—I wish I could walk into that house and sit right down by the fire in that young man's place. I—I believe I could even put up with the gurgling infant, for all it is so fluffy and fat and I have such a detestation of children.

There, it's out ! I've said what I think. Nice respectable thoughts for me to have ! a worldling, gambler, spendthrift, and—and—well, I've not been anything worse so far. I might add murder to the list of my accomplishments if that young husband were to continue to flaunt his happiness in my face, bother him ! Phew ! how cold it is ! Time for me to think of getting back to the city. Nothing very inviting there to get back to, but I suppose there's nothing else left for me to do.

I'm getting sick of cities anyway. I've a good mind to try the country for a while. Could I sink into some quiet place like this

and turn gentleman farmer? It would be funny, awfully funny.

I think I'll toss up and see what Fortune says about it. Green tables or green fields—which shall it be?

I throw up a quarter.

“Heads—city; tails—country.”

Have to light a match to see what has turned up; it is getting as dark—

“Heads!”

I pocket the piece and turn away in the direction of the city. Often have I wondered since that evening what my fate would have been if it had turned up a tail. Now I am glad it didn't. My trip back to the city was uneventful, save that the pleasant phantom of that young wife kept floating through my mind and I continued to harbor an unholy resentment towards her husband.

These thoughts did not conspire to make me very merry, and by the time I had reached the top floor of the second-rate hotel where I was to sleep that night I was savage enough to brain a baby.

For a long time I twisted about on the hard mattress, thinking of my vagabond life, and

wondering to myself if the time would ever come when my wanderings would end and home become a familiar word on my lips.

After I had gone to sleep, the longing of my heart found expression in troubled dreams. It seemed to me that I was chasing a phantom of Peace, who fled before, loose-haired and garmented in white, whose face, turned towards me in the race, wore ever a mocking and alluring smile.

And as I stumbled in the pursuit I noticed what a strange land it was through which I followed her. All the forests seemed cut out of green baize, and the light that fell from above was not soft, as the sun, but as hot and foul-smelling as burning gas in a closed room. And all around me rose strange mountains built of cards, and the sweeping torrents were red as wine. And still the phantom beckoned me on, and still I stumbled and fell, to rise again, wounded and dismayed, to resume the chase. And then I came to a great pool of whirling waters, on whose brink the phantom paused as in a fright. And just as I was about to reach out and seize

the hem of her floating robes, she disappeared, and I was battling with the waves for my life.

The struggle woke me up. The choking sensation in my throat was not a fantasy. The room in which I lay was filled with heavy smoke, and I was slowly strangling. I jumped out of bed and lay down for a moment on the floor to get a breath of the fresher air as yet not vitiated.

Then I crawled out into the hall over a tiled floor that I felt must soon split from the heat, and on to the corridor beyond.

I was a late arrival at the weird soirée in progress in the outer hall, where the prevailing décolleté style of the assembly reminded me of a queen's "drawing-room."

Everyone was dancing in his abbreviated garments, though little regard was paid to the step or the time as they whirled about in the waves of the gray sea that spread from wall to wall.

Nor were they dancing because they liked the exercise.

Indeed, one man, whose face wore a clerical cut, and who was capering around in a scarlet shirt and one boot, seemed on the point of

remonstrating with the more energetic of the performers, but he himself had to keep hopping because the floor was so hot.

And as the mob danced, they howled like dervishes, and I had only to close my eyes, take a whiff of the burning woodwork, and imagine myself in a lively corner of purgatory.

After I joined the assembly and did a few *pas seuls* myself not to appear unsociable, I discovered that they were all pushing and crowding towards the end of the hall to reach the fire-escape.

A fat man, in a long white night-gown peppered with red spots, had become wedged in the opening, and all efforts to dislodge him seemed to be in vain, though several people had hurled their boots at the poor man with cruel precision of aim.

At last one unsympathetic though practical-minded person in a pajama charged the spotted obstruction with a boot-jack and a profane word which I still shudderingly remember.

The combination of profanity and propulsion proved too much for the man in the

window; there was a melancholy howl, and the spotted night-gown and its contents disappeared from view.

The crowd, yelling and swearing and tumbling over each other, swept through the aperture, and I was left alone, standing stupidly on one foot like a melancholy crane, with a dreamy expression in my eyes and my whiskers highly illuminated.

I was hesitating whether to follow the crowd or not. A piece of burning woodwork striking me just at that moment on the back of the neck decided the question. It was certainly time for me to go. I knew that the night was chilly, and that I had better not venture out, as some of the others had done, in the simple costume of a Greek slave, so I crawled back to my room to get on a few clothes.

Groping around on my hands and knees I succeeded in finding my coat and trousers, which I dragged on; then I crept back into the hall again.

The wainscotting was crackling merrily, and the fire seemed to be laughing gayly as

it raced up and down this "fire-proof" building that offered such a feast for its hunger.

To reach the window I must traverse a fiery path strewn with blazing brands hissing like snakes under my feet. Never did a king pass through a finer pyrotechnical display than I down that blazing hall ; yet I did not feel proud, and I do not care to try it over again.

I took my time. I was in no hurry. Crawling on your hands and knees over hot tiles and blazing wood is not the best field for racing purposes.

The window seemed miles and miles away. I could hardly see it at the end of the fiery river, which before my burning eyes and sinking senses had turned red as blood. Still I staggered on, choking, strangling, seared by the flaming brands that fell around me, scorched by the hot tiles beneath my feet.

I was swimming in a wave of fire. My throat was shrivelling up in the heat. I tore at it with my bleeding, blackened hands, crying hoarsely for air ! air !

Then with a great effort I stumbled forward blindly and fell across the window sill.

The flames had set my clothes on fire, but what of that? I was drinking delicious draughts of the cold night air.

What happened next I have no clear idea. I believe I fainted.

CHAPTER II.

MY DREAM COMES TRUE.

IT might have been months that I lay in the torpor of oblivion, before the mental darkness was dissipated and I saw the world of light again—at first only through distorted glasses, where forms and objects seen in my delirium assumed strange and uncouth shapes, that in turn seemed to threaten and torment me.

But in all these semi-conscious hours there was one vague vision coming and going, whose presence was like a balm to my poor distorted brain, and whom, in my most feverish moments, I looked forward to seeing with feelings of inscrutable desire and longing.

Slowly, very slowly, my brain cleared and the confusing mists that clouded my mind rolled away. And yet, as I opened my eyes and looked around me, I was half convinced that an opium dream had succeeded the old dreary delirium.

My hands, black as an Ethiop's from fighting the flames, fumbled a silken spread, sprinkled with forget-me-nots, that draped the white enamelled bed in luxurious folds.

Through the rich Moorish curtains that hung from the centre of the room I caught the gleam of silver sconces and a curious jewelled lantern where a perfumed light was burning.

From the carved onyx fire-place a cheerful log fire shot shafts of light over the inlaid floor, polished like a mirror and strewn with soft rugs and skins.

What did this all mean? I asked myself, as I looked around me with dilated eyes, wondering what metamorphosis had taken place in my affairs since I went to bed in that shabby hotel and received such a warm though unsatisfactory welcome. I thought of "Avatar," that marvellous story of Gautier's, in which the soul of one man is transplanted into the body of another, and I began to wonder if my soul was not occupying the shapely form of the young man I had envied in Arcadia Park.

Because I was in a shrine of the genius of

home. The indefinable atmosphere of peace was in the air; the crackling voice of the fire had a soothing sound; the mirrors duplicated the delights of the cosy interior, as if they took pride in repeating so charming a prospect.

This was no hotel. It was a home such as I had longed for in my wanderings, such as I had not known these many, many years.

I half closed my eyes to dream about my surroundings. Of course there was some dreadful mistake. My enjoyment of this peaceful place would be short-lived. I must resume my vagabondage again and my restless tramp over the continent, with headquarters at Baden-Baden, and, for society, black-legs and Greeks, or the questionable *salon* of some Russian princess who gets drunk on vodka every night before going to bed.

And knowing how short my stay would be in this restful little paradise I half dozed and dreamed and tried to fancy that the rook had really come to stay in the dove's nest, and that he need never be a social outcast again.

As I lay there looking drowsily about me I began to think that perhaps I had really

passed beyond the dark river and reached some preparatory heaven of delight. No, that could not be possible ; because right in front of me, on an alabaster pedestal, stood a bisque dancing-girl. She wore such a worldly leer on her piquant face, that I knew she could only have come from modern Paris or some equally wicked city.

My delicious dreaming, however, was pleasantly disturbed by feeling a cooling little hand laid softly on my heated forehead, gentle as a benediction. I opened my eyes wide now, then closed them again, as if to hold the picture in my mind as long as possible.

I had seen a face, a young girl's, bent toward mine ; and in the dark blue eyes there was an expression of tender solicitude, incomprehensible but charming. Her graceful head was covered with short curls like gold shavings as she leaned towards me, her oval face flushed a delicate rose. Assuredly this was a new phase of my delirium.

"I am so glad to see that your mind is clear again, and that you have lost that wild look in your eyes," she murmured, softly. "You have been very, very sick, Jack, dear."

"Jack, dear!" What did she mean by that? Clearly there was some terrible mistake. I looked at her again in a bewildered way.

"I am afraid that dreadful fire has affected your memory," she added, with a sympathetic look in her eyes. "One would think you had never seen me before, and it is only five years since you went away."

"I—I'm afraid my mind is affected. The fright—the fire, you know," I stammer, faintly. "Who am I?—what am I?—where am I?"

"How funny"—with a merry little laugh, that gave a glimpse of sharp, white teeth—"how very funny, to forget who you are!" Then, more seriously: "Why, you are Jack Henley; cousin Jack. You went away to Australia five years ago and came back the night of the fire."

"Oh, yes! now I remember," I mumble, resolved to profit as much as possible by the mistake. "And you are—"

"Sylvia Dene."

"Cousin Sylvia?" How sweet it sounded!

"Cousin Sylvia. You haven't forgotten,

Jack, those merry times we used to have at Barrytown on the farm, and Juno and Mars and the rabbits. Poor old Juno ! she died last week"—with a pathetic intonation in her voice. "If you had come a few days sooner you might have helped me bury her. She was so fond of you. I believe she would have remembered you after all these years."

"I hope so," I say, in a non-committal way.

"We don't like New York," she explains, after a while ; "but after papa died, the farm was very lonesome, so I got Aunt Fanny to bring me here. She said it was a good place for us to forget in. I think it's a better place to be forgotten"—with a pretty pout. "Why, we've only half-a-dozen acquaintances in the city, though I subscribe to every charity that I hear about, and we always have champagne on reception-days. When you get well, Jack, I expect you to show me how to get into society."

I maintain a blushing silence. A nice usher I should make for the purple penetralia, after an experience as croupier in a cheap Paris gambling-hell.

"That is, if you are not going away again,

Jack," with a half-sad look on her face. "You won't run away and leave us again, will you?" And there is such a tender look in her eyes that I am tempted to draw that charming face nearer to mine and kiss it softly, just once. "You won't go away again, will you," she adds.

"As long as you want me to stay," I say, sadly, "I shall be glad to remain."

"Then it will be forever, cousin Jack," with a glowing smile; "that is, until you grow tired of us; and Aunt Fanny and I will do all we can to make the waifderer happy. I suppose it will be rather tame at first settling down with a couple of stupid women after roaming through the bush."

"One tires in time of a vagabond's life. I have had enough, young as I am. I feel the need of rest and a home," with all the longing of my heart in the words.

"How sadly you say that! It must be glorious to wander around in search of adventure! Did you ever meet a cannibal?"

"No, not of the wild species, but I have been thrown in with other kinds of man-eaters."

"I'm sorry for that." Then, after a few moments' silence : "Some day you shall tell me all about your adventures."

Guileless angel ! if I were to tell you half of them you would turn from me in disgust ; you would hold me in loathing and contempt, and rue the hour my presence ever sullied your thoughts. If you ever learn what I have been, it shall not come from my lips.

But I was still mystified by the sudden change in my fortune, curious to know by what freak of destiny I was in this room and talking to Sylvia Dene.

"I can hardly remember how I came here," I said, faintly, passing a grimy hand across my forehead as if to brush away some confusing cobweb that filled my mind.

"No wonder, Jack, for you were insensible those days, and it was only by chance that we learned of your whereabouts. You were picked up unconscious at the fire and taken to a hospital. They discovered your name by a diary and some papers found in your clothes. Aunt Fanny read the account in the morning paper, so we lost no time in going after you and bringing you here."

"Oh, yes," I sighed, as if I was trying to remember, turning my eyes again towards the fire, which sent out warm, odorous gusts of heat, that swept soothingly over my face.

"I—I should like to have a look at that coat," I said, after some moments' thought. "I left some important papers in it, which I am afraid have been destroyed, for I was burning like a pine knot the last thing I can remember."

Now, I thought, I shall find out how I came into this little domestic Eden.

"Certainly, dear," said Sylvia, slipping out of the room for a moment.

I was hoping, in my heart, as I counted the pomegranates on the frescoed ceiling, that some transformation had taken place on the night of the fire, and that I had arisen from its ashes re-created in the body of Jack Henley.

She was at my side again very soon, and in one hand she carried the sorriest looking garment to be seen out of Rag Fair. It was the phantom of a coat, shrivelled like a mummy's winding-sheet, and as full of holes as if it had been the target of a Gatling gun.

I reached out a claw-like hand and took up

the half-burned fragment gingerly, lest it should fall to pieces.

I put my hand in the breast pocket and drew out a leather-covered note-book, a few letters, and some cards, while Sylvia watched me with an earnest look in her beautiful eyes.

I examined all the pockets, the lining, and the strap in a meditative mood.

"Do you recognize it?" she asked, at length, fearing that my memory was still unreliable on account of the fire.

"Yes," I answered, still lost in thought. And I did recognize that precious garment, but not as ever having belonged to me. Then, like an inspiration, I knew why I was in this house and how the mistake had been made.

The night of the fire, when I rushed back to get my clothes, confused by the smoke and excited by the terror of the moment, I must have wandered into an adjoining room and appropriated somebody else's garments. Discovered in an insensible condition, the papers in the coat had furnished my identification, and I had been advertised in the papers. This dear girl at my side had been quick to rush to her cousin's rescue, and had brought the

impostor home in triumph to be nursed back to life again.

I looked towards her guiltily, feeling that she must read my thoughts, but her face was turned away ; she was looking dreamily into the fire.

I argued with myself, as I lay there, that I could not be held responsible for what had taken place. I had played the part of an impostor unwittingly ; it had been forced upon me. Of course, as soon as I was able to stand steadily on my feet, I must acknowledge the mistake and go away out of this little kingdom, and never see Cousin Sylvia again.

I looked at her pure profile, outlined against the mauve enamelled walls, and sighed. Why was I never to enjoy more than a peep at paradise, and then be compelled, like the shoemaker of Jerusalem, to wander on through life, looking in vain for the rest ?

Well, at least I must make the most of this delightful mirage that must soon fade away before my eyes. I would try and think that this was indeed to be my home ; that I had

come here to stay as long as I would with Cousin Sylvia and Aunt Fanny.

I could not understand how it was possible that they had been deceived in my appearance, for I could not have borrowed the lost man's countenance at the same time that I borrowed his coat.

You see, I was still hoping to find that I was really Jack Henley, and that the vagabond was only the fancy of a distorted brain.

"Cousin Sylvia." I took a delight in repeating that name over and over in my thoughts ; it rang like restful music through my brain.

"Cousin Jack"—raising her clear eyes toward mine.

"I fancy I must look like a blackamoor after the fiery bath the other night. Do let me look at myself."

"Well, I don't think you would ornament a Christmas card"—with a laugh. She handed me a dainty silver mirror. I held it before me a little doubtfully, wondering what it would reveal.

What devil's magic was here ? Who was this chimpanzee confronting me from the

crystal's pellucid depths? I did not recognize my own face! This dreadful mask could not belong to me. I rather prided myself on my good looks. This could not be the same face which the Princess Erisoff had said reminded her of Byron, and which had provoked the *première danseuse* of the Venice Opera-house to twice attempt suicide because it refused to smile upon her.

And yet the picture was familiar. I was a study in brown of my former self, and might have joined a minstrel troupe without needing burnt cork to make up.

If the phœnix rose from its ashes looking half as disreputable as I did, I do not wonder that the species is extinct, for the birds of the air were justified in destroying his kind forever.

Slowly and reluctantly I recognized myself. My hair and beard, burned off in patches, bore a ghastly resemblance to the curling locks that had been twined by so many distinguished fingers. Those gray eyes, though they wore now an expression of disgust, as they turned to the glass, were quite at home among the surrounding features. When I

opened my mouth and saw a certain well-known tooth, I closed my jaws with a convincing snap, conscious beyond peradventure that I was indeed myself and no one else.

To tell the truth, the discovery disappointed me. I was in hopes that I should find myself Jack Henley, and so be able to cast anchor in these pleasant waters and not think of moving away for years to come.

It was all up with my delusions now. I was only the vagabond, ex-croupier, actor, miner, and gutter broker; and soon, too soon, I must resume my tramp again.

I was sorry that I had such a mummified appearance. I wanted to look well for the time I was to enjoy Cousin Sylvia's company, but alas ! like *She*, I had left all my beauty in the flames, and was now about as picturesque as a Yarmouth bloater of uncertain age.

As I looked at her now in the window-seat, playing with a scarlet cockatoo swinging on a brass ring between the curtains, I thought what a shame it was to deceive such an innocent mind as hers.

Several times I was on the point of acknowledging the deception, but somehow the words

that I wanted to say would not group themselves properly in my mind. The thought of being cast adrift in the world again seemed to fill me with a cowardly terror. I wanted to cling to this refuge as long as possible ; for the first time in many years I knew the meaning of rest.

But I wondered what had become of the real cousin Jack, whose place by their grateful family hearth I had unwittingly usurped. The poor fellow might have been wounded in the fire, and be now languishing in some hospital. Perhaps he was dead ! Dead ! I repeated the word half in a whisper to myself, "Dead !"

If he should never appear, never be heard of again, why, I might step into his place in this house and live and die Jack Henley, with no one the wiser. What a mad thought ! And yet it coursed again and again through my troubled brain.

Then, on the other hand, he might have speedily recovered from his injuries of that night. He might be even now on his way to the house to have me thrown out, and before Sylvia's eyes. Better to tell her the

truth now than wait until I am denounced ; or I might bide my time for a chance to escape, and slip away and never trouble them again.

To argue the matter over in my mind was one thing ; to speak out was another. Every time I turned towards her with that intention, I caught a gleam of her kindly smile and tender eyes, and became speechless at once.

"I know what you are thinking about," she said, catching me in one of these attempts at an explanation. " You are thinking that I am a very stupid girl not to take the hint that you want to get up. You mustn't leave the room, though, for days yet, the doctor says. Are you well enough to see Aunt Fanny ?"

"I would rather wait until my brain is a little clearer and I present a better appearance. I might frighten her with this face ; it is out of perspective." She laughed.

"Oh, prodigals are expected to come home a little the worse for wear. Aunt Fanny has not seen you, you know, since you were twelv

years old, so she is naturally anxious to renew the acquaintance."

Not since I was twelve years old ! I repeat these words over to myself. Nothing to fear from an interview with Aunt Fanny ; she cannot embarrass me with questions, at any rate about the past.

"She says you were such a handsome boy," continued Sylvia.

"Well, if she saw me now she would hardly think I had fulfilled the promise of my youth," I add, with another grimace at myself in the glass.

"Vanity ! as if anyone cared how you looked ! We like you for what you are, and not because you happen to have handsome eyes or a long mustache, you silly boy."

If you knew what I am, I say to myself, you would be much more likely to hate me.

"Well, I am going," says Sylvia. "You will find some clothes in the dressing-room ; and if you want anything, just pull the bell in the corner. You won't see Aunt Fanny ?"

"No—no, not just yet," I stammer. "I want time to look about me."

"Conceited! Well, I'll come in and call this evening if the doctor will let me."

"Do," I add, heartily, as she runs out of the room, taking half the pleasure of the place with her.

I am alone at last, with my guilty conscience. Sorry as I am to lose sight of Sylvia's cheery face, I do not feel the same sense of shame as when her innocent eyes are upon me.

Everything has been done for my comfort. In the dressing-room I find a suit of clothes and a plush dressing-gown lined with silver fox.

I have no hesitation in putting them on, and I then consult the mirror again. A decided improvement! With a clean shave, I lose much of the disreputable air that startled me a few moments before.

I light a cigar, and through the smoke wreaths I build various diaphanous dream-castles as I loll back in the soft, plush chair, thinking how hard it will be to lose all these comfortable surroundings and go back to the dreary *table d'hôte* and the dingy caverns of the second-class hotel; to exchange, for Syl-

via's society, the Continental *salon*, with its hostess-harpy tricked out in borrowed jewels and a borrowed title.

Bah ! I don't want to think of leaving here just yet. I believe if I knew that the real Jack Henley himself was on his way here I should linger to the last moment, until I was thrown out bodily.

This cosy place has enervated me. I want to stick here as long as I can. I'm tired of living by my wits and at the expense of weaker fools. For a time let me know the meaning of peace, and think only of to-day.

Supposing Henley should never turn up ? Absurd ! Of course he'll turn up. From what I can gather he has been a ne'er-do-well himself, and must be as glad to settle down as I am. Some people take to a roving, adventurous life from choice ; but I was forced into it. I couldn't stay in the country after poor old father died. The family name was not popular after he was mixed up with that mining swindle. So I skipped to Europe and lived by my wits ; and precious poor pickings it was sometimes !

What if Henley is dead ?—destroyed in that

fire? This question keeps running through my brain again and again: What if he should be dead?

It is possible! very possible!

I find his diary still in the pocket of the coat where I saw it last. Strange that a man of the world should keep a journal! There is so much in a rover's life that he does not care to put on paper; that at least has been my experience. There are, after all, only a few pages of the diary, but they give me an insight into the life of Mr. Henley that I am glad to get. Having knocked around the bush myself I am able to talk about Australia as well as he could were he here.

If Sylvia's father were alive he might embarrass me with questions; but he is dead, and Aunt Fanny has not seen me since I was twelve years old. I could have changed a good deal since those days.

Just then I catch sight of myself in the glass, my face intent in revolving a problem in my mind, the mouth set, the eyes dreamy yet earnest.

I start to my feet with almost an exclamation of dismay.

"What are you plotting?" I ask myself in the glass. "You—you—you vagabond!" —with a frown, that is returned—"you have some scheme on foot; out with it."

I stand looking at my reflection steadily as if I expected an answer.

"You have stolen into this house by mistake. Leave it as peaceful as you found it. Your place is not here, but in the world beyond. Join your brother rooks, but leave the dovecote in peace."

There is as much vehemence in my voice as if I were addressing another person. Then I sink into the chair, with a sigh, and mutter with lazy defiance, "No, I'll not go! I've made up my mind to stay."

CHAPTER III.

THE LOST MAN.

I HAVE been here a week. I am beginning to feel quite at home. I have made the acquaintance of Aunt Fanny ; she has taken the prodigal to her bosom, so to speak ; and I have almost begun to believe that my wild life in Europe was only a nightmare, and that I am at last living in the blessed reality again.

Never did a wanderer receive such a royal welcome. I virtually own the house and everybody in it. Every wish is anticipated ; I need not ask for anything. I have even begun to find out that I have a conscience. I thought it was buried out of sight long ago, but Sylvia's warm glance and kindly smiles have melted the ice in which it was frozen.

At present its voice is very weak, but it is growing in strength ; and when I have locked myself in my room at night it tells me dis-

agreeable things and makes unkind accusations.

I am aware, in the midst of my luxurious life, that I am standing on very thin ice ; so at night, after admiring myself in the glass, I generally wind up by asking the question, “ Well, how long is this thing going to last ? ”

I had to go through a wretched bit of humbuggery the other day ! I hope I shall not have many more performances of the kind.

Sylvia brought out a little card-case that Jack Henley had given her before he went away, and the dear girl seemed to be quite affected by the sight of the miserable thing.

I of course had to say something sentimental when she asked me if I remembered the day I had given it to her in the orchard. Then she hung her head a little and blushed, from which I gather that the real Henley must have kissed her, which was very sensible in him, I should say, if she was even half as charming five years ago as she is to-day.

I don't want to go through many more ordeals of this kind, or I shall throw up the game. I used to be a tolerably accomplished liar, but there is a gleam in this child's beau-

tiful eyes that disconcerts me when I am fabricating. It seems that Sylvia and Henley were child lovers in the old days ; and ever since he was banished from her father's house for some indiscretion she has gone on sentimentalizing over his memory. She has idolized the scamp, and set up in the shrine of her love a statue of gold, which I dare say in reality is only clay thinly gilded.

I am getting to be actually ashamed of myself in playing my part ; yet I have played many more disreputable rôles without the same feelings or compunctions.

I should have laughed a few months ago if anyone had accused me of knowing the meaning of "ashamed." For years it has been an obsolete word in my vocabulary.

What a change one little week can work in a man's destiny, and thought, and heart ! Ah, me ! I really believe I am taking on a coating of purity, like a piece of base metal placed in a silver bath.

But all the time I have not been idle. I have been studying the papers every day, in the hope of finding some traces of the lost man. It is impossible that he should have

disappeared without leaving a clue—even in this city, where so many are lost.

I shall feel more contented in mind if I know he will never come back. Yes, it has come to this. I am so thoroughly satisfied with my new life and my new quarters that I shall not make a change until I have to—until I am driven out with a sword, like the outcasts of Eden.

It is a dangerous game to play, and my courage may fail me; but I shall try. There is so much to be gained that I am willing to run an infinite amount of risk.

To-day I was overjoyed to get my trunk; that is, his trunk. I needed some clothes, and I was a little anxious to satisfy myself further on some delicate points regarding his career. It was a piece of good fortune that the trunk was saved from the flames, and its arrival seemed a good omen of success.

Poor Henley had packed it to the brim with new clothes, and presents intended for the family. I found his coats a little roomy, but it was very easy to explain that my illness had reduced my weight, and then get them altered.

The distribution of the presents was a painful task, which again seemed to stir up my sleepy conscience. You see, I had to make a neat little speech when I gave Sylvia hers, stating where I had purchased them, etc., and she thanked me so tenderly, with brimming eyes, that I was almost tempted to tell her she was wasting her gentle feelings on an unmitigated scoundrel. There was also some money in gold in the trunk, which came in very handy, and some uncut gems that I suppose he picked up in the wilds. The latter I converted into cash as soon as possible, and deposited the amount received, with the gold, in the bank in Henley's name.

I am beginning to worry, shut up in the house so many days, even though I have such a charming turnkey as Sylvia at my beautiful prison gate. A week in one room is a long while when a man has led such a wild, gay life as I have, knocking around the Continental capitals. I think this afternoon I will start out for a walk.

I dress myself and go down-stairs. Aunt Fanny, a rosy-cheeked little lady in rustling

silk, comes out of the drawing-room as I cross the hall.

"Do you think you are strong enough to go out, Jack?"—a little anxiously.

"I shall never be strong until I have a little fresh air, Aunt Fanny. You know what a life in the open I have led."

"We must get you a horse. Sylvia has long wanted to ride since we came from the country; but there has been no one to go with her, and she don't care to ride with a groom."

"Not afraid she would fall in love with him, I hope?"

"Why, you horrid boy, to make such a remark! Sylvia is very decided in her likes and dislikes. I don't think any man in the world could deceive her as to his true nature. I know she will never be humbugged by a fortune-hunter."

I cough feebly. My power of deception must be wonderful, for she has certainly not penetrated my mask of hypocrisy.

"I had a curious fancy to-day," I say, to change the subject, "to visit the scene of the fire. I think it gives me a sort of triumphant feeling to visit the scene of a narrow

escape, though I don't know that I could feel any more gratitude than I do towards you and Cousin Sylvia."

"Well, don't try, my boy," smoothing down one of the puffs of her fluffy hair with thin, jewelled fingers. "After all, we are the ones to be the most grateful that you were saved, because you have come back to cheer the lives of two lonely women."

"Yes," I stammer, uneasily.

I wish there was a mirror near at hand so that I could look at myself. I really believe I am blushing. The sensation is so strange that I should like to watch myself in such a predicament. The sight would be so novel. I turn away lest she should see the guilty expression in my eyes. Dear old lady! her heart is too guileless to suspect that I am a specious humbug who has stolen into her heart and home by mistake.

"Don't be late, Jack," she adds, as I turn away. "Major Carriston comes this evening to spend a few weeks with us, and we shall have a few other people to dinner."

"I shall only be gone an hour at the most,

Aunt Fanny," I say, as I grope my way out into the hall.

Now, who can this Major Carriston be? I ask myself when I reach the street. Evidently a good friend of the family, since they invite him for a long visit. His arrival will complicate matters considerably, for I cannot help connecting his name with Sylvia's in my mind.

If he is in love with her he will naturally be very jealous of me, and try to find out all he can about me, which is just what I do not care to have him do.

Altogether the idea of Major Carriston's arrival is an unpleasant one. I don't know why I should feel a suspicion arise in my mind that he and I have met somewhere before, in that life, in that world, I am trying so hard to forget.

The cold air blows away some of these fancies as I trudge along over the frozen snow.

After my week's imprisonment it is invigorating to once more be free again, and my spirits rise accordingly.

Once I have settled the question of Jack Henley's disappearance, what a life of peace

and comfort lies before me! The very thought sends a delicious thrill through every vein.

It seems to me that this portion of Broadway wears a familiar look, though it is years since my feet trod its crowded pavements.

Ah! I remember now. Here my poor father had his offices in the old days. Here, poor man! he formed the partnership with the sharks who dragged him down and made the family name a byword and me an outcast.

They acquitted him in the courts, but they could not acquit our name of the stain that must remain on it until the end.

I felt my eyes grow moist as I recalled his pathetic figure in the dock, his bowed head, his piteous grief.

He died a few weeks after the trial, and I was left alone in the world, a child of fortune to hammer out my own living as best I might. I walked faster now, to rid myself of some disreputable shadows of the past that were following me closely. I wanted to think only of the future. I had suffered a great deal, but happiness was now very near, and

I had but to reach out my hand to grasp it. The waves had buffeted me about, but now there was promise of a calm ; a favoring gale would waft me to the happy isles that smiled in the glory of peace ; and there stood Sylvia with outstretched, welcoming hands.

I am standing now before the scene of my terrible struggle—the flight through the flaming passage. It all comes back to me as I stand there ; and yet I would run that fiery gauntlet over again if Sylvia stood waiting for me after the struggle was over.

The blackened walls now wear festoons and fringes of ice and snow, and cast strange, fantastic shadows on the ground as I pick my way slowly among the debris.

Then a terrible thought strikes me—what if I should stumble upon the bones of poor Jack Henley ? I shiver and pass on.

What remains of the ruins is being torn down and carted away ; the work of removal has evidently been going on for some days, for there are large fissures in the blackened walls. In the doorway of a temporary shanty an Irishman is sitting, smoking a short clay pipe. He is superintending the carting of

the ashes and stones, and pauses now and then to remove his pipe from his mouth and yell at a derelict driver of one of the little dump carts.

"Maginty!" he screams, as I come up, "do yez t'ink this is a funeral, an' yer afraid ye'll get there before the corpse?"

He sucks on his pipe and stares at me not unkindly. "Mornin'!"

I return the nod. He looks like the kind of a man I need to ask some questions about the fire.

"Terrible fire you had here," I begin, waving my hand in the direction of the ruins.

"Ah, ye may well say that, sir. Faith, I never saw such a fine conflagration in me loife. But it's throwed a few jobs in me way, so I'll not complain," with a philosophic puff at his pipe.

"Everyone escaped?" I asked, carelessly.

"Every mother's son except a haythen Chinee, bad luck to his banjo face! A flame took the cross-eyed divil across the back while he was sprinklin' some clothes, and he'll never put another rat in his ugly mug. It was a visitation of the Lord for robbin' a poor widdy

woman of the washin', the haythen baste. Ye might know her—Mrs. O'Flynn!"—waving his pipe over his shoulder as if to indicate where the lady lived.

I had to confess that I had not the pleasure of her acquaintance, which made him look sorry; and I was aware that he set me down from that moment as a man who had neglected his opportunities.

"I suppose there were a number of people injured," pursuing the subject that brought me there.

He shook one dusty hand with a sorrowful gesture.

"Ah, sir, there were some of the poor craytures had faces that battered their own mother wouldn't have recognized; and thim that was late in leppin' off the escape had mugs on them like a fry in a box; and others ag'in was that twisthed, begorry, I think they could look down the backs of their own necks, so I do. I saw one poor gentleman wid his legs that bent, 'pon my loife, ye couldn't tell, for the sowl of ye, whether he was walkin' towards ye or goin' the other way. But I hear

they're all of them now mendin' foinely in the hospital, and will soon be out agin'."

"I am anxious to learn if a friend of mine was saved from the fire. He was not among those at the hospital, and he has not put in an appearance yet. You are sure everyone was taken out of the burning building?"

He scratched his head for a few moments and took a long pull on his pipe.

"It might be," he said, half to himself.

"What might be?"

"I was thinkin'. You see, me friend Jerry Fogarty, the janitor of the hotel, on the mornin' after the fire discovered a poor cratur wanderin' about among them ruins"—waving his pipe towards the crumbling walls. "Divil a thing had the poor man on him but an ould pair of pants, and they were burnt as if he'd been through the hottest corner in the whole house."

"And did your friend speak to him?" I asked, eagerly, for it seemed that I was on the right track at last.

"That he did, sir. Jerry up and axed him who he was and where he came from, but the answer he got he cudn't make head nor tail

of. He thinks it must have been Spanish or some haythen lingo the man shpoke."

"And what happened then?"

"Well, as no one seemed to take any interest in the poor thing, why Jerry's that kind-hearted, though he was throwed out of a job himself, and in the middle of the winter at that, and havin' two children wid their mouths always open, and flour and coal high out of sight—what does he do but take the poor thing home and fix him up in some ot his own clothes and fill his impty stummick wid ham an' eggs, as purty as ye plaze. And may I never die in sin, but there he lies this minute in Crimmin's Rints, singin' and mumblin' to himself for all the world like a born natural."

He could not have found a more interested listener than I was to this simple recital. Every word only added to my agitation of mind, and I found myself quivering all over with nervous excitement.

I must see this unfortunate man as soon as possible. If he were really Henley, why—but I had not made up my mind what to do if my suspicions were verified.

The kind-hearted Irishman looked at me curiously as these various thoughts came and went.

"An' ye think it may be yer friend?" he asked, sympathetically.

"I hardly dare hope so, and yet it seems highly probable from what you have told me."

"Thin I'm sorry for ye," shaking his head solemnly, "for you'll find him in bad shape. It's my opinion that, in tryin' to get out of the place durin' the fire, he was knocked silly wid a fallin' bame, and that his sineses are all mixed up so's he don't know who he is or where he came from. I saw the poor cratur the other night, and whin I axed him what his name was, he shook his head very sad, and put his hand to his forehead like as if he was tryin' to remember. I tell ye all this so's ye won't be scared when yez see him; for it's a sad sight to see a foine man lose his name and not know whether he's himself or somebody else."

I was not listening now to what he said. I was thinking how the Devil was playing into my hands, smoothing the way to my success. True, Henley was not dead, but death would

be more merciful now than life. For all his years he was condemned to grope in the dark, blind in the midst of a world of light.

I felt as I stood there that I was almost guilty of this dreadful affliction that had fallen upon him. But soon my own selfish thoughts of success rose to the surface. If he were dead as far as the world was concerned, so much the better for my hopes, so much surer were my chances of success in this desperate game I was playing. Who could now dispute my right to the name I had assumed, or which had been thrust upon me?

Would anyone dare to drive me out of the home that was now so dear to me?

I was safe! safe!

These hopes and conjectures came and went in a few seconds.

"What you have told me is very interesting," I said, with recovered calmness. "I only hope that the unfortunate man will turn out to be the friend I am looking for. May I?"

"You may," he said, frankly, as his grimy fist half closed over the five-dollar bill I held towards him. "If I was loike the workin'

min ye see on the theayter stage," he added, with a grin, "I might strike an attitude an' say: 'Take back yer gould. The Irish laborer will never except money he has not airned.' Now, that may do to plaze the gallery b'ys, but it don't hold good when a man's flour barrel is impty and his old woman's on the broad of her back wid rheumatics. Thank you kindly, sir ; and not to be outdone in ginerosity, take these tickets for O'Phelan's raffle, and we'll call it shquare," at the same time thrusting some dirty pasteboards into my hands.

"Take 'em, sur. The raffle's for Big Limp, the sailor, who's been tuk down wid brown gaiters, I think they call it, this three weeks come Sunday. The raffle comes off at O'Leary's saloon on the corner of Thirty-first Street and Sicond Aveny. Ye sthand a chance of winnin' a billy-goat an' a pair of brash candleshticks his own mither brought from the ould countrhy," with a twinkle of humor in his eye.

"The inducement is tempting," I said ; "however, you had better keep the tickets and take my chances in case I am too busy

to appear. Now, let me know Jerry's address. I must go over there at once. Whether his patient is my friend or not, he shall have the best medical advice. In such a case every moment's delay is precious; his reason, and even his life, is in danger," with an apprehensive shudder, as some dark thought coursed through my brain.

"Well, yez must take the cross-town cars at the Twenty-third Street—or you can walk," as a brilliant afterthought.

"Yes, yes," impatiently.

"Get off within a block of the river."

"Yes."

"And walk north until ye come—"

A hand is laid on my arm just then. I turn with an angry exclamation and face Sylvia.

"Why, Jack, who would have thought of finding you here?"

And for a moment I am staring at that rosy face and those sparkling eyes as if I had never seen them before.

"I'm afraid I startled you!"

"Ye—es," as I find my voice at last. "I have been talking about the fire, you know—

rehearsing some of the scenes of that terrible night—and I suppose it has put me in a timorous mood."

" You ought to try and think that it never happened. Don't come here again, will you, Jack ?" and the tone and the expression in her eyes send the blood flowing back into my pale cheeks again.

I look up for the first time since her arrival and see that she is not alone. A tall, military man, with a long mustache, is staring at the ruins through his glasses in an attitude of listless interest.

" Why, Major, I forgot all about you," laughs Sylvia, turning towards him.

" Yes, I see you have." He does not laugh; he scowls as his gray eyes run over my person.

" Major Carriston," says Sylvia, " this is my cousin Jack—Jack Henley," introducing me.

" Delighted, I'm sure," he drawls, holding out three pearl-clad fingers ; but he doesn't look a bit delighted.

" Who in thunder can this fellow be ?"

we are mentally asking each other as our glances meet reluctantly.

With all the charm that Sylvia's presence holds for me I do wish she had come up a little later. I must satisfy myself about the lodger at Fogarty's. My eyes wander about the place, but my friend, the Irishman, has disappeared.

"I—I trust we have not interrupted your conversation," says Major Carriston, with a sarcastic smirk not at all to my liking.

I don't like his looks at all; this man is going to be a decided nuisance.

"I was only talking about the unfortunate people who were injured in the fire. There was one case in particular that interested me. I think I shall try and do something for him."

"Ah! a philanthropist, I see," with his confounded laugh again. "You must show me how to do good among the poor."

"I am sure he could not teach you to do evil," said Sylvia, gayly placing her arm in mine with a friendly pressure, a familiarity which the Major observes and disapproves of with his eyes.

"Now," she cries, "we will go home to

dinner. I shall walk between you two, while you each pour sweet nothings into my shell-like ears."

So she chattered all the way home; but the Major and I had little or nothing to say. I know I made up my mind that I was going to hate him with a hard, business-like hate.

CHAPTER IV.

WAS IT A WARNING ?

THE shrinking debutante of the season, hesitating on the brink of the social pool, could not wear a more troubled mien than the one which confronted me in the mirror that evening.

I was about to make my first public appearance in a new rôle, and I was surprised at my general rickety condition and the nervousness expressed by my fingers as they fumbled a refractory white tie which would not fit in its place.

I was puzzled to explain my weakness, because I had played much more hazardous games in my life than the one I was about to essay ; yet here I was all a-tremble like a bread-and-butter *ingenue* at her first ball. I had no doubt that I should be able to comport myself properly, though it was such a very long time since I had been in the company of real ladies and gentlemen. What,

then, was the reason for this shameful attack of weakness?

The Major?

Yes, there was no use denying it. His appearance seemed like a menace to my hopes. I scented him at once as a rival and an enemy, and I knew that it must be a war of cunning against cunning between us two till the end.

Yet I had reason to believe that my position was now tolerably secure. I had traced, as I believed, the whereabouts of the missing man. The anticipated danger that he might plunge in upon me at any time was happily averted. For the present he was impotent to injure me. I might sleep in peace so far as he was concerned.

You see, I was figuring positively that the lodger at Fogarty's was John Henley. If I was mistaken in the supposition, then he must indeed be dead; so either view I took of the matter lent an added light to my prospects.

I was secretly afraid of the Major, though loth to confess it, and I knew I must call my deepest cunning to the surface in this secret war that was about to open between us.

It was quite evident that he was a suitor for Sylvia's hand. He would be my rival, and would therefore stop at nothing to put me *hors de combat*. He would watch me carefully for a slip, and I must keep constantly in mind that his gray eyes were following me in everything I did.

As I surveyed the track along which I was to run for my beautiful prize I saw that the Major was the most serious hurdle to leap in the whole course.

To-night I felt tired and dispirited; but there was no way for me to avoid going down to dinner. Sooner or later I had to make a public appearance in my new rôle, so it might as well come to-night as any time. The sooner it was over the better, and the more easy I should feel in my borrowed plumes.

I dressed myself very carefully, lingering persistently over an obstinate lock of hair which I generally twined with a poetic droop in the middle of my forehead. Then I fumed and grew heated over a refractory collar-button that seemed to assume the proportions of a turnip when I tried to force it through a button-hole. But at last, after getting thor-

oughly warmed up and generally irritated, behold me surveying myself in the long pier-glass, clothed, but not altogether in my right mind.

Not a bad figure this young man presented as I cocked my eye at him critically. A good-looking scamp, who would not look out of place in any drawing-room, and whom you would not hesitate to introduce to your daughter if you were unfamiliar with his past !

I think I can say, without egotism, that I looked uncommonly well. Enforced abstinence and keeping regular hours had given my face an interesting pallor. It seemed to me, also, that since I had become a member of this little household I had begun to lose a great deal of that devil-may-care manner that had been a distinct part of my personality in the days when I had been a vagabond.

I say *had been* a vagabond, as if I never expected to be a Continental tramp again. Well, it gave me pleasure to think that my position here was secure. Why borrow trouble of the future ? A lion-tamer once told me that, if you take a tiger-cub or a baby-lion to your home and clip its claws and feed it

upon milk or some such mild diet, it will develop in time a character as bland and amiable as any grimalkin who dozes by the fire. In short, it will live to forget that it was ever born a man-eater and a terror.

Now just such a metamorphosis I am convinced is quietly going on within me. I can feel it ; and I am confident that in time, if I am allowed to linger in this benign atmosphere, I shall develop into one of the most docile and lamb-like of human beings.

Having dusted my nose with a little powder and given my mustache a coquettish twist I went down-stairs.

Sylvia was just crossing the hall, and she gave a little cry on seeing me.

"I was just going up after you, Jack," pinning a clove-pink in the button-hole of my coat. "We have rung the bell twice, and Aunt Fanny is in a furious rage."

"I must beg a thousand pardons," I said, penitently. "I had no idea it was so late."

"I thought you might have fallen asleep," leading the way into the parlor. "You looked so tired when you went up-stairs."

How lovely she was that night ! Her dress

of dark-green velvet fitted her supple figure like a glove. Her face and bosom rose from this sheath of green like a tea-rose from its leaves.

Never had she appeared to me so beautiful. What an enchantress this soft, white little woman was ! The maddest, gladdest thoughts went dancing through my brain whenever I met her face to face. Already I was under the spell, too feeble to resist it even if I had cared.

And yet, as I entered the brilliant dining-room, and the murmur of voices struck my ear, and I smelt the perfume of flowers and incense of good things, I was thinking of the dingy tenement where the real Henley was probably eating his meal at this moment. And I saw a poor, witless creature mumbling his food in a gray corner, with dull, lustreless eyes bent on space, and a quivering and feeble mouth—a darkened mind groping vainly for the light.

I sat down among the fairy lamps, the cut glass, and the silver plate with half a sigh as this picture irrepressibly rose before me. Why did such melancholy thoughts intrude

themselves at such a time as this, when I wanted to appear gay and witty and at my ease? There were only two guests besides the Major at the table. One was a short, stooping individual with beetling brows and a mop of tousled gray hair that hung over his eyes in a frizzy bang like a Yorkshire terrier's. With him was his overdressed wife, whose brilliant red dress gave her the appearance of a gorgeous lobster. She was a lady of impressive manner, and spoke with tragic emphasis even when asking for a second helping of soup. Later I was introduced to this peculiar pair—Mr. Edgar Rossiter, a popular realistic novelist, and his wife, an ex-leading lady at one of the city theatres.

I looked them over furtively after the introduction, and felt satisfied that I need fear no foes in that quarter. They were too much interested in themselves to bother about anybody else. I had never read any of his books, and I had never seen the wife act, but I pretended to be thoroughly familiar with their names and reputations.

The lady was of a reminiscent turn of mind. She always prefaced her remarks

with "When I was playing with Booth" somewhere, or "The season I was with McCullough," with an emphatic jab in the pickle dish.

Even such an unsuggestive object as a pot of Boston beans would resurrect a buried memory, and she would forthwith launch out in a flood of reminiscences and stage stories.

The husband also dealt largely in reminiscences when not engaged in talking about himself or his work. The dining-room in which we sat reminded him of the hall in his latest story, "A Sweet Sinner;" and he assured me that I was the image of the hero in "A Daughter of Dreams." The last information was conveyed with as much gusto as if he were presenting me with a patent of nobility.

"Mr. Rossiter," said Aunt Fanny, after I had been seated some moments, "you ought to be able to get the materials for a story out of my nephew. He has been a sad rover for the past five years, and must have had no end of exciting adventures."

I looked up just then, and saw that Major Carriston was eying me curiously. I wish I

knew what he is thinking about. Does he fancy that he has met me before somewhere?

"My dear madam," said the novelist, "I am afraid Mr. Henley's adventures, however exciting, would not inspire me with a plot. We realists, that is of the American school, try to *live* our plots or get the materials at first hand. If I want to describe a house in my story, I go wandering about the country until I find one suited to the requirements of the plot. Then I sit down and sketch it out in detail, from the swallows in the eaves to the smell of the drains. Why, I sat all night on a cellar door in a driving rain, so as to be able to fitly describe the emotions of Roscommon Twiddlesex waiting for his wife's lover in 'Passion's Prey.' If I have to describe sewers I sacrifice myself to the cause of art by going through them in order to perfectly reproduce the sensations and even smells of such places."

"I should think, Mr. Rossiter, you would suffer a good deal from malaria," Sylvia put in, with a malicious little laugh, as she gave me a familiar nudge.

Aunt Fanny frowned, and Mrs. Rossiter

started as if somebody had uttered a profanity.

"I suppose, Mr. Rossiter," said the old lady, "that your passionate scenes are not all the result of personal experience."

"Naturally not. I am afraid," with a faint smile, "that my wife would offer some insuperable objections if I were to go in search of some of the adventures described in my books. She gives me invaluable aid herself, though, in posing as the heroine. That is where her dramatic ability comes in so valuable. The most important feature, however, in a realistic romance is to create the atmosphere and vitalize the accessories and *mise-en-scène*. Inanimate objects are quite as important in the parts they play on our realistic stage as animate. The arm-chair or *tête-à-tête* in a boudoir are no less important than the people who occupy them. The frill on a pillow-sham can arouse as many glowing thoughts as the fair head that rests upon the pillow. When you describe a chair, for instance, it must be different from any other chair. You can convey the idea from your description just what kind of a woman it belongs to,

whether she is young or old, homely or fair, and whether she wears open-work stockings. You can give such an air of abandon to the details of the legs of that chair that the male reader will be as much interested as if you were describing a ballet-girl."

" You are very frank in exposing the tricks of your trade," put in the Major, addressing apparently a piece of fish on the end of his fork. " It is my opinion that realism in fiction is being pushed too far. I remember, when I was in Paris last summer, hearing of a poor devil of an author who died in attempting to be a realist. - He had never been able to get his books on the market, so he thought it would be a brilliant idea to hang himself. He expected to be cut down by his friends in time, of course, and proposed to write up his experience while dangling in mid-air. Well, the friends went off and got tight. They were a couple of students, and forgot all about the poor devil on the end of the line. When he was finally cut down it was too late to write anything."

" It is so hard to attract attention now in the literary world," said Mr. Rossiter, " that

new authors will resort to any trick to gain the public ear. Just take the case of Townley Fessenden. He used to write absurd stories of low life, where everybody talked blank verse, and the heroine generally died in the spring with a bunch of violets at her breast. That man knew he would never make a name writing that sort of stuff, so what does he do but go and marry the material for a novel."

"Married the material?" asked Aunt Fanny, looking around the table blankly.

"That's what I said; and never did a man pursue a stormier path to fame. You may have heard of Mrs. Jossamy, a widow who once gave select receptions to patent-medicine poets and contributors to the chambermaid weeklies. She had the reputation of being a perfect ogress; was married several times, and got rid of the husbands with suspicious expedition after the briefest of honeymoons. Fessenden saw her; she was not bad-looking; saw in her also the material of a great realistic novel; and married her."

Mr. Rossiter paused and drew a long breath.

"Every time after that, when she smote

him with a slipper, or went into hysterics, or indulged in other diversions of the kind, he wrote a graphic description of the incident in his note-book. He lived with her a year. A marvel it was that he lived that twelve-month through at all ; but he hungered for fame, and he would have celebrity even if he was hustled into it with the slap of his wife's resounding palm. That year must have seemed like a century of purgatory to the poor man. And yet there was a compensation for his woes in the note-book crowded with the richest material for a realistic romance of a quality no one could dispute. There was no difficulty, of course, in getting a divorce, for there was the note-book to give silent testimony to the widow's might. When he was free he drew upon the matrimonial journal for the facts of a story, and the result was "A Marriage Venture," now in its thirtieth edition. It made him famous at once. Ah ! " shaking his head, "the way that man can describe a slipper striking bare skin is superb ; you can almost feel it yourself—you really can!"

There was some laughter over this, which

seemed to irritate Mr. Rossiter. He looked upon us evidently as persons who had no reverence for realistic art.

"Come now, Cousin Jack," cried Sylvia, gayly, "you are the most adventurous spirit of the party. Thrill us with some startling story of adventure. Are you going to let these stay-at-homes bear away all the honors of the occasion? Tell me something romantic about the bushwhackers."

"Or the Greeks," said the Major, quietly transfixing me with a direct glance that startled me strangely.

I stammered, because I knew he was staring at me. What could he mean by that allusion to card-sharpers?

"There is nothing very romantic or poetic about my only encounter with a bushwhacker," I hasten to say. "The one it was my misfortune to meet was dirty and profane, and knocked me off my horse because I had nothing to give him but a bad sovereign and a railroad pass of the year before. No material in that incident for a story, Mr. Rossiter."

"If I had been there myself," said the

novelist, "I should have got the material for several novels out of him. He would have been the most robbed of the two, I assure you. I never lose a chance to turn such an incident to account," wagging his head. "I bought a haunted house once, when I was engaged in writing a spiritualistic story, but I caught more colds prowling around the damp halls at midnight than I did ghosts. As for burglars, I generally get more out of them than they do out of me. They find a few plated spoons, and I interview them and get the nucleus of such a story as 'The Midnight Mystery' or 'The Cat's-eye Ring.' I suppose you have read them."

I nodded in a non-committal way which he might interpret as he pleased.

"Both of those stories were taken from life. It is the only way to write a real book. Why, just to give you an inkling of my methods, I assure you that when I was getting up 'A Modern Lothario' I used to climb up a ladder into Mrs. R.'s boudoir, just to appreciate the emotion of such an adventure."

"I should think the emotion would have been far from pleasant if some one had hap-

pened to be passing and filled your illustrious person with buckshot," said Sylvia, roguishly.

"Oh ! one must expect to suffer a little in the cause of art," said the novelist, loftily. "Think what a realistic effect the escapade had on paper ! I never met anyone yet who did not say it gave them a guilty tremor to read the narration of that midnight exploit. That's what the reading public want nowadays,—that is, in America,—a distinct shock, pleasant or unpleasant. They would just as soon be disgusted as delighted, and if a writer can blend the two his fortune is made."

"I should think you would find more material for your stories—ah—in Europe," drawled Major Carriston, keeping his eyes more on me, I thought, than on Rossiter. "America is too new to have the proper atmosphere for novel-writing."

"It is improving every year, Major. You can find in the lower part of the city more races than in Cairo. As you say, the atmosphere is too new to generate a great literature, but we shall get that in time. I am doing a great deal myself. We shall see," bowing his head modestly. "Give us time. I might

find a better field for literary endeavor in the Old World, but it takes a long time to convince people that a modern novelist knows more of his art than a Balzac, and in the meantime I should starve."

"Hunger is a great incentive for work, Mr. Rossiter," put in Sylvia. "Think how many men have starved themselves into immortality!"

"Immortality is a mystery that no one can grasp or understand. I prefer to write for the present rather than for the unborn generations to come. If, as some scientists say, the world is intellectually degenerating, there will come an era of idiocy. The penny dreadfuls of this century may become the classics of the next. To write for immortality in this age is to attempt to forecast the tastes of the future, and that is beyond anyone's power. That's where the dingy Grub Street hacks had the best of us latter-day literarians. They were not hampered with silly prejudices and the scruples of mercenary publishers. Society is pretty much the same at heart to-day as when 'Tom Jones' was writ-

ten, only it has learned better how to disseminate."

"Now, Mr. Rossiter, you are getting ready to abuse the age," said Aunt Fanny, shaking a warning finger. "Be careful, sir."

"My dear madam, the age is all right. I am to blame for having been born in it with an eighteenth-century brain."

"I should think you would find it fossilized by this time." Sylvia smiled maliciously. She turned to me with a look of half-anxious inquiry on her face.

"You look pale and tired, Jack. Perhaps this dinner has been too much of a tax on your strength."

"It will soon be over," I said, as the coffee was brought on. "I think, after all, it has cheered me up to hear the others talk, though I am not much in the mood to be entertaining myself."

I should like to shine, if it be only to show the Major that I am not an utter idiot; but my head aches terribly, and my ideas seem to be in an inextricable tangle.

I feel his eyes are upon me even at that moment. Strange that they should give me

such a qualm of fear ! It is because I am treading on strange ground, I suppose, that makes me suspect everyone.

“ Your ring, Mr. Henley—”

I feel myself flushing, and hastily move my hand out of sight. I had forgotten all about that ring. I ought to have thrown it away or buried it out of sight. It links me to the past that I want to forget. This momentary embarrassment does not escape those sharp gray eyes of his as he continues :

“ You will excuse me, Mr. Henley, for referring to your ring, but that strange setting of silver filigree reminded me of a little incident that transpired while I was in Vienna. It is a story that cost me five thousand francs, so it ought to be good.”

“ I would write you one for less money,” murmured the novelist, in an absent-minded way.

“ Well, this was an adventure I did not seek—um ! ah ! I don’t think I should care to repeat it either, don’t you know.”

“ Do tell us,” piped Sylvia.

“ Do,” returned Mr. Rossiter, pricking up his ears, while his eyes assumed a business-

like glitter. "But I warn you beforehand that I shall steal it for a book if it is at all novel and dramatic."

"Welcome, I'm sure—but it's only an incident. I made the acquaintance at the hotel of a Russian prince, Sergius Rouloff he called himself, though I believe the beggar had no right to either name or title. Very pleasant scamp he proved to be: a cool hand at cards, could pink the ace at twenty paces every time with a duelling pistol, rode like a centaur, and danced like the devil in a dress suit. He knew the best wines, the best restaurants, and where a pleasant evening could best be spent. We used to play cards together in the hotel. I generally won. One night we visited a proprietary club. I had dined rather—ah—heavily, and was in a genial mood towards the world and everybody in it. Was introduced to some friends of his there, all men with high-sounding titles. We sat down to play a game of American poker."

Instead of sipping my coffee, I lifted it to my lips. My hand was trembling violently. The Major's eyes seemed to be boring

their way through me like gimlets. He continued in the same passionless voice :

"The Prince did not play, but sat by my side where he could see my hand. During the game heady wines and liqueurs were freely circulated. As the evening advanced I lost heavily. The Prince suggested, sympathetically, that I might stop whenever I wanted to, but I was in a stubborn mood and resolved to sit there and retrieve my fortune if it took a week. I might have played myself into the workhouse if my eyes had not been opened."

"Ah, now we shall have it!" exclaimed Rossiter, as he rose like a gudgeon to swallow the situation of the story.

"I noticed that the Prince kept one hand carelessly on the table. I was reminded, seeing Mr. Henley's ring, of the incident, because the Prince wore one just like it. The flashing of this ring attracted me and drew my attention to the hand resting carelessly by my side. I noticed that the Prince often moved his fingers, particularly after looking at my hand. Observing him closely, I saw he was telegraphing to a confederate."

"And then—and then?" whispered Mr. Rossiter, tragically.

"I rose to my feet. '*Voleur!*' I cried, flinging the cards in his face; and in the confusion I ran from the place into the night."

Everyone present started.

The cup had fallen from my hand and shattered noisily on the table.

Everyone was looking at me wonderingly, amazed. The room was a revolving wheel of color. Where was all the coolness that had carried me through so many hazardous adventures? I was not strong, and the story had unnerved me. For I had been there that night. I was the lieutenant of the Prince, or, rather, of the blackleg who had swindled him. It was the same ring now glistening on my finger. Carriston must have recognized me. This was a warning, the first gun from the enemy—a hint that I must leave the house or I should be exposed. These and a thousand other thoughts flashed through my brain as the room swayed before my fainting vision.

"Ah, Jack, you are ill," cried Sylvia,

almost with tears in her voice. The sweet sound rallied me at once. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I am like a skeleton at the feast," I said, with a nervous laugh, as they all pressed around me with words of sympathy. "I think I had better go to my room, for a while at least."

I felt angry to break down before such an audience ; it seemed so childish : but then that cursed story had set my brain whirling.

"Major Carriston, will you give my nephew your arm?" said Aunt Fanny. "This is his first day out after a long illness, and he has overtaxed his strength."

"Delighted, I'm sure," returned the Major, offering his arm as gallantly as if he were about to escort a pretty woman to her carriage.

My hand trembled as it touched his coat. I wonder if he noticed it. I could have banged my head against the door from sheer vexation ; I was making such a fool of myself.

"I shall not let you out again very soon," said Aunt Fanny, shaking a warning finger at me as, half supported by Sylvia and the Major, I moved towards the door.

I was not much of a burden on the Major as we made our way up-stairs. I kept my eyes averted lest he should read my story in my face, though half-believing he had guessed it already.

They left me at the door of my bedroom with many expressions of sympathy and solicitude. I felt much more courageous now that I was in the sanctity of my own chamber, where I held secret interviews with my old self when alone. So I convinced them that the faintness had all passed away, and apologized for giving them so much trouble.

As the Major and Sylvia passed down the stairs I heard her say :

“ How strange that he should have been overcome while you were telling that story ! ”

“ Yes,” rejoined Carriston, with his lazy drawl, “ it seemed rather a peculiar coincidence.”

CHAPTER V.

THE FOURTH STORY BACK.

A GRAY court, a broken fountain, a red-haired woman knitting on a red stocking in the sun. Such are my first impressions as I pass from the noisy street into the malodorous shadows of Crimmin's Rents.

Half timidly I glance up at the windows on either side of the way, as if I expected to catch a glimpse of a vacant face, dull eyes, and trembling mouth outlined against some grimy pane—the face of the man I am looking for—John Henley! At least I can do something to help him, though I do not reinstate him in his rightful place. If it is possible to make his life comfortable, no expense shall be spared, and the poor people who have taken him in shall be amply rewarded.

Of course, I argue to myself, if his case is hopeless, if he can never have his reason restored, why should I take the trouble to tell

Sylvia or Aunt Fanny about him at all? It will save them a great deal of unpleasantness if I keep the secret. To delude their kind hearts would be certainly more merciful, in the present instance, than to tell the truth. How much better to cherish the delusion than be burdened with a helpless reality!

The Fogarty family are evidently well known in Crimmin's Rents, for the lady knitting the red stocking pulls herself together at the sound of the name and offers to direct me how to find their apartments. She leads the way into a foul-smelling hall, keeping up a rattling accompaniment of remarks regarding her trouble with her neighbors, as I plod on over the greasy boards in her wake.

Every door we pass arouses some ireful reminiscence. According to my cicerone there are a great variety of infamous characters in the house; and a certain Mrs. Ginger, in particular, appears frequently in her conversation, whom she avers that she will some day deprive of her heart.

I am glad to cross her dubious palm with silver and make my escape up the stairs in the direction of Mr. Fogarty's apartments.

Knocking at the door, a shrill Irish voice bids me

"Come in!"

I do so. Mr. Fogarty, muffled in a blanket, is propped up in a chair by the fire, smoking a blackened clay pipe. Two children whose sex I cannot determine are rolling around about his feet.

He springs up on seeing me and limps over to a chair, which he dusts carefully with a bandanna handkerchief which he has removed from his throat.

"Have a seat"—pushing it towards me. "The new collector, I suppose?" with a dubious look of inquiry, stroking his chin whiskers thoughtfully. "Ah, sur, I'm afraid ye've come a little too soon for me to be glad to see you. The fire, ye see, throwed me out of a job, and havin' this accident," illustrating his remarks with a limp, "it's the devil's own time I've had gettin' a sup of anything to ate for meself and the childers."

"But I'm not the collector," I hastened to add.

"Naw?" taking his pipe out of his mouth

slowly and eying me over doubtfully. "Mebbe a parson, then?"

I almost burst out laughing. I must be certainly improving in appearance to be taken for a clergyman.

"No, indeed, Mr. Fogarty, I am neither, and you need have no fear about your rent; it will be forthcoming."

"Eh, what's that?" as if he did not quite understand me.

"I say your rent will be all right. I'll pay it myself. First answer a few questions as quickly as you can. You rescued a young man from the burning of the Carlton House."

"No, sir."

"What's that?"

"I didn't reshcue him. He was already reshcueed when I found him."

"Oh ! I am relieved!"

"You see, sur, I found him wanderin' about the ruins on the mornin' after the foire. All the others was tuk away, but somehow they come to forget him. Anyway, he couldn't shpake his own name, and seemed daft and foolish like; so, as no one interferes, I just up and brought him here, d'ye

moind? And me and me old woman—she's out workin' the day for a lady—we have took quite a likin' for the poor thing, though all he does from mornin' until night is sittin' in the sun playin' and singin' to himself."

"Mr. Fogarty," I cried, "you are an angel!"

"What's that?" starting up as if I had called him a disagreeable name.

"I repeat, you are an angel. You have gone out of your way to be kind to a helpless stranger, a burden that few people would have readily assumed." I was in such a glow of enthusiasm that you might have imagined I had helped Mr. Fogarty in his benevolent work.

"Now, what a fuss about a little thing!" protested the Fogarty, stroking the paint-brush on the end of his chin caressingly. "Why, I'd do the same for a tramp cat in an ash-barrel, 'lone a human bein'. It's my opinion," puffing thoughtfully on his pipe, "that the poor man got hit wid a fallin' timber that knocked him silly, so's he cudn't remember his own name nor nothin' at all, at all. Well, I knowed if I didn't take him in they'd haul him off to the hospital, where

thim doctors would have a high old time experimentin' wid such a curiosity. I had a brother once that got struck by a train one mornin' as he was rollin' home wid his shkin full o' mountain jew. It was his head was bad, like the poor gentleman yonder," pointing with his pipe. " Well, when thim doctors got trew wid him, I tink dey must have put his brain again in his head upside down, for from that day he always talked backward, and his thinker was that mixed up it tuk us a long whoile to get the way of it. When he asked for a chew of tobacco, he meant a hair-cut, and whin he said it was going to rain, he wanted a glass of whiskey, d'y'e moind? Ah, it tuk us a long, long time to git onto the change in his cranium. Out o' that, ye devil!" to a tow-headed child who had stolen up while he was talking, and taken a secret pull at the pipe resting on the arm of the chair.

"Ah, he's his father's own b'y," said Mr. Fogarty, running his fingers through the jute patch that crowned the young one's mottled face. "I was just such a howly terror meself when I was Dinnis's age." Then, reflectively,

"Would you like to see the poor gintleman?" at the same time filling his pipe. "He's very quiet, but he's not mortal fond of strangers. He shlapes most of the time when not fiddlin'."

"Fiddling?" I ask.

"Yes, he's got hold of my old man's violin, and is that fond of it that I haven't had the heart to take it away from him since."

"Is there any way I could see him without being seen?" I ask, in a half-ashamed sort of way. I felt as if I could not face the poor man. It would be like bringing a murderer into the presence of his victim.

"Oh, that's aisy to manage," said Mr. Fogarty, with alacrity. "It's the next room but wan. Ye can take a chair, get up on it, and look over the skylight, d'ye moind? Hear that!" as the soft sound of a violin was heard from without. "He's playin' agin. Always sad as the wailin' of a banshee. It gives me the creeps sometimes to hear him."

And there was a world of sorrow in the strains of the violin as the music rose and fell and died away in faint echoes down the corridor—a sobbing in the strings, like the

moaning of some one in pain, the wail of a lost soul groping in the night.

"Ye may well look sad," said Mr. Fogarty, noticing how serious my face had become; "but do you know, sir, I think the poor crater is tryin' to tell me his story through the violin? He's daft himself, so he puts his soul in the strings so they should shpake for him."

Guided by the plaintive voice of the violin, I made my way along the deserted passage, carrying in one hand the stool Mr. Fogarty had kindly loaned me.

I was trembling all over with excitement—just why, I could not tell. What I was about to see could not be so horrible—only at the worst a vacant face, a crouching figure, and two lustreless eyes.

It was some time after I had reached a position where I could look into the room that the occupant could be defined in the uncertain light. Something was moving about in one corner, swaying to and fro as the strains of the violin rose and fell. By-and-by this object lurched toward the window and stood in the light, playing a sad melody that was like the wailing of the wind.

Was this old man in the tattered dressing-gown indeed Jack Henley? Had it not been for the violin I might have fancied that I had made a mistake, and that I was looking in upon another room. There could scarcely have been more than a year's difference in our ages, and, having led a wild life myself, I might easily have been taken for thirty-four. But the man before me looked fully sixty.

His sufferings on that terrible night of the fire must have been beyond imagining, for his curling hair had turned almost white. I could not get any definite idea of his face, because it was covered with a stubbly beard. His features were regular and his mouth was not feeble, like an imbecile's. It was only when he turned his eyes toward the light that I could see they were cold, as if cut out of lapis lazuli.

Now and then, as he played on the violin, he sang over and over again these melancholy words :

“ Art thou lonely in thy tomb?
Art thou cold in such a gloom?
Rouse thee, then, and make me room.
Miserere Domine.”

The place, gloomy as a grave, the vague gray light that fell upon the singer, gave a spectral shade to the picture, and I could not repress a shudder. In the next moment he had left his dirge-like song far behind and was humming a blithe air from a comic opera. His face was smiling now as he swayed to and fro to the rapid music. Yet the sight was so incongruous of this poor, witless creature being gay at all, that I thought the sad song was more in keeping with the place.

As he swayed to and fro in the light from the grimy window I called him by name.

“Henley, Jack Henley,” I said, softly and yet distinctly. But he did not start, though I know he must have heard me perfectly. He paused for a moment in his playing, and looked around the room with an attentive air. He evidently did not recognize the sound of his own name, for his eyes showed no flash of intelligence. As I did not speak again, he took up the violin and resumed singing the dreadful dirge.

I turned sadly away toward Mr. Fogarty’s room. I felt the weight of a great guilt on

my mind, thinking of this poor; miserable creature playing there in the twilight alone.

"Mr. Fogarty," I said, when I had resumed my seat by the fire, "I am not even a friend of this poor fellow. I never saw him before until to-day, but I am interested in his case, and I propose to do all I can for him."

Mr. Fogarty nodded and sucked noisily at his clay pipe.

"I was in that fire myself," I resumed, "and I cannot think without a shudder that I might even now be in his place if I had not been so miraculously saved. I think I can best show my gratitude for preservation by doing what I can for—what do you call him?"

"Well," said Mr. Fogarty, "I call him Heywood."

My own name!

"You see," he added, "they found the hotel register some days after the fire, and on it was the name of a party called Heywood who didn't turn up at all at all, so I give it to him yonder," waving his pipe in the direction of the violin player.

Here was a strange coincidence. We had both changed our identity. If Major Carriston were to pry into my secret now he would be completely mystified. My position was growing more and more secure.

"And does he understand you when you call him by name?"

"Well, at first the poor thing looked as if he'd never heard the name of Heywood before, but now he seems to understand well enough."

"And are there any signs of his intelligence returning?"

"Oh, he has flashes, when he talks as good as anybody, but of what's past he don't remember nothin'. I've tried him again and again, but he only shakes his head and puts his two fists to his forehead like as if his brain had turned to stirabout."

"Now, Mr. Fogarty," I asked, "would you feel insulted if I were to offer you a little money for the trouble you have taken for this poor man?" It was Henley's money I was offering, so I could not believe I was doing wrong in providing for his comfort.

"Mr.—Mr.—" began Mr. Fogarty.

"Henley," I said.

"Well, Mr. Henley, I didn't expect this, but I won't say but what it comes in handy, bein's as I've lost me job as watchman at the hotel, and me old woman has the rumaticks that bad she can't go out much. So I'll take it [it was a twenty-dollar bill], and thank you kindly for the same," stowing it away in a jar on the mantelpiece.

"Does there seem to be any hope that Heywood will recover?" starting at the sound of my own name. "You have had a doctor?"

"We have that, sur, but he always shakes his head after looking at the poor crater. He says he thinks that perhaps there's some piece of the skull pressin' down on his brain, and that some of them great doctors might be able to do something, but it's beyond him. I think he said they might tin-pan him. Now, phwiat the devil did he mane by that?" shaking his puzzled head dubiously.

"He probably spoke of the trepanning process. The skull is perforated and a piece taken out to relieve the pressure on the brain."

"Oh dear! oh dear! Cut a chunk out

of his head, is it? Bore a hole in the top of him, is it? Well, what next?" holding up his hands.

"It is a very delicate operation. Did the doctor think of performing it?"

"Oh, dear, no! he said he couldn't. It was out of his line, which is just dosing people; but he said there was them as could do the job, though there didn't seem much use of tryin' it in this case."

The shadows were gathering in the room. Mr. Fogarty got up and lit a kerosene lamp and stirred the fire.

"It'll be time to be givin' the poor chap his medicine purty soon," he said, nodding towards the clock. "I give him a big shpoonful every two hours," taking up a bottle of some red liquid and shaking it up in front of his eyes. "It's a caution what nasty things them doctors do fix up for a man when he can't help himself. But this must be mortal good, for it smells enough to knock ye down," making a wry face as he brought the bottle up to his nose. "My, but that's awful to put in yer stummick!"

"How do you manage to give it to him in the night?" I asked.

"Oh, I luk after that meself. You see, I've been a night watchman for these ten years back, an' I can't get out of me old habits of roamin' around at night. Me old woman looks after him durin' the day, and I takes me turn from six to six in the mornin'. When she goes out washin' I have to get me sleep when I can, as I did to-day. Between the two of us the poor thing gets his shtuff reg'lar."

"And what would the result be if you failed to give him his medicine at the proper time?" I asked, with an awakened interest.

"Well, he gets worse at night, and the medicine quiets him. If we can keep him down for a few weeks, now, the doctor says he may in time get to know something again. If he were to lose his medicine all night and get roarin' aroun', why sure there would be no hope of his ever findin' his thoughts again. His brain would never recover."

"Never recover! never recover!" The words rang through my brain with endless reiteration.

"I'm sorry I have no refreshments to offer ye," said Mr. Fogarty, looking hard at his youngest born as if in doubt whether to offer it to me grilled or on toast. "I might send Dinnis out with the growler if yez could fancy a glass of ale."

"Don't put yourself to any trouble on my account, Mr. Fogarty, I beg."

"Oh, it's no trouble."

"But I am not thirsty."

"Well, I'll get some, anyway, for I'm mortal dry myself; and then, you see, it's comfortin' for me to have a sup around when I'm doin' night work. Helps me keep awake. Here, Dinnis," to the boy, "get me a quart of new and old mixed, and don't be whiskin' the froth off on the way home or I'll skin ye."

The "growler," a huge stone pitcher, almost as large as the boy, was dragged out of a corner, and Dinnis was dismissed with a parting admonition to "kape yer nose out o' the foam and tell Grogan to give good measure, because it's for a sick man."

"How is it," I asked, after the child had gone away, "that no inquiries have been made about this Heywood by his friends? Have



you arranged it so that he can be found if anyone comes in search of him?"

"Oh, yes, sur. They know at police headquarters that I have him here. Me ould woman has been down there several toimes, but you're the only one that's inquired about him yet. I'm afraid he's a stranger in these parts. Well, it's small matter if he's not called for, because we like him. When I bring him his medicine, or his bit of tay and mate, he don't say anything at all wid his mouth, but he shpakes like a born oraytor wid his eyes, as if he'd like to thank me but couldn't."

Mr. Fogarty looked sympathetically in the fire, and I felt a twinge of shame when I thought of my own cowardly part in this strange drama. I did feel a decent desire, however, at that moment to arrange for the comfort of poor Henley. Give me credit for that.

" You have been so good to this waif, Mr. Fogarty, that I don't think he could be placed in better hands. I will feel very much indebted to you if you will do all you can for his comfort. The case is so peculiar, and I am so grateful for my own life being saved,

that I want to make a handsome allowance every week for this victim of the fire ;" and I mentioned a sum that set Mr. Fogarty's eyes dancing with wonder. I could afford to be generous, since it was Henley's own money I was spending.

"Ah, it's kind of ye, sur," said the good-hearted Irishman, grasping my hand warmly in his, while a tear glistened in his eye.

"Ye see, we've tried to do what we could for the poor thing, but he's a gentleman, an' used to comforts which take more money than we have handy. The Lord reward you sur, for your goodness to a stranger."

Then I was aware that the blood in my face was becoming abnormally warm, and I coughed drily and turned away my head lest he should see the shame in my eyes. I felt that he must see that I was an impostor if he looked me full in the face. But he had turned to the fire again, his features wreathed in a glow of kindly thoughts, and when he looked at me it was with a half reverent expression, as if he were addressing an angel fresh from the clouds.

Presently the door opened, and the shock-headed little boy entered, staggering under the weight of the pitcher, now crowned with a wreath of snowy foam.

"Ah!" said Mr. Fogarty, sitting back in his chair and smacking his lips, "there's the stuff. Why, the half of it's foam," he exclaimed, as he poured out a glass. "Have yez been makin' love to it on the way here, ye spaldeen—eh?" shaking a red forefinger in close proximity to his hopeful's nose. "Come now—out with it, or ye'll get a taste o' the strap when mother gets home."

"I—I didn't drink none of it, pop. It was just this way. Missus Moggs—"

"The cross-eyed gerl that married the drunken fiddler? Oh, yes, I know."

"Well, she met me as I was comin' up with the beer."

"Oh, she met you, eh?"

"Yes. And she said as mom was alluz borrowin' thinks of her, and as we 'uns never had nothin' worth borrin'."

"What's that? what's that?" cried Mr. Fogarty, jumping to his feet excitedly, though he must have understood the little boy per-

fectly. "Nothin' worth borerin', is it? Faix, the next thing I do will be to borer her husband's face and break it. Well, well, well ! what else did she say?"

"She said she thought it was a good time to get square, so she ups with the pitcher and drinks near the half of it," rubbing his nose with the back of his hand tearfully.

"May it pizen her," said Mr. Fogarty, heartily ; then, conscious that he had been forgetting me, he said hastily : "Well, there's no use of lettin' what's left get flat. Dinnis, go get the fancy moog for the gintleman."

"Thank you," I said, looking at my watch, "I must be going presently ; and, besides, the doctor has ordered me not to take any stimulants for awhile."

"Well, I'm sorry yez can't join me." He drank, however, with as much relish as if he had company. He had just laid down his glass when the clock struck six.

"Time for me to visit my hospital," he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Do you care to see *him* before you go ? I'll give him his medicine now."

"You will find me in here when you come

back. There was something else I wanted to speak to you about."

"All right, I won't be long. Dinnis, fetch the lantern. I don't want to break any more legs this year."

And with the bottle of red medicine under his arm he stumped out on his improvised crutch, while the little boy shuffled on ahead with the light.

After this strange couple had disappeared I went over to the window and looked down into the court. The red-haired woman had disappeared, and in her place some ragged boys were howling around a burning tar barrel they had dragged in from the street. In the doorway of the opposite tenement a young man was idling, smoking lazily on a cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth.

He wore a velvet coat and plaid trousers, and a rakish-looking hat was cocked over his right ear.

"That's what you were and that's what you must return to," I said, addressing myself. And indeed there was much about this good-looking loafer that reminded me of my old vagabondage. And as I stood there I recalled

the Irishman's words: that if Henley were left alone all night without the sedative he would never recover his mind again. "Never again!"

How the future unfolded itself before me as I repeated over and over those simple words, "Never again!" I need never again go back to the old wild life—never again be an outcast and a wanderer, straying here and there like a strange dog without a home. I should marry Sylvia, and we could go away to some quiet place where I was not known and I should taste for the first time the joys of living.

The dangers that menaced such a scheme were few. Major Carriston was suspicious, but I was confident that I had a stronger hold of the hearts of Aunt Fanny and Sylvia than he, and in time I could rid our little circle of his presence forever. As for Henley,—the real Henley,—I could send him away into the country with Mr. Fogarty, where he would be out of the way in case any signs of returning reason showed themselves. As I turned away from the window the white top of a bottle protruding from my coat pocket caught my

eye. It contained a powerful narcotic which I had bought to cure an attack of insomnia.

I took it out and held it for some moments in my hand, thinking. Then my eyes roamed slowly around the apartment. I saw the pitcher of ale on the table where Mr. Fogarty had left it. Half of the contents of the vial poured into that jug would cause the one who drank its contents to sleep for hours and hours.

He would sleep—sleep and forget his patient down the corridor. It was an easy thing to do, just to spill some of the brown contents of the bottle into the pitcher, and yet that simple act would make my future secure. Sylvia would be mine forever, and the desire of my heart for rest and a home would be gratified.

I uncorked the vial. The light from the lamp struck the glass as it quivered in my nervous hands. Just then, like an echo from underground, came the sound of the violin playing that gloomy dirge with its sad refrain : “*Miserere domine.*”

I turned with a guilty shiver towards the door as if I half expected it to open and that

pale, vacant face in its frame of ash-colored hair appear before me like an accusing angel. I set the pitcher away from me, where I could not see it. Why, this thing that I was about to do was worse than murder. I was condemning this poor fellow, who had never done me an injury in his life, to a living death—to walk in darkness all his days.

Then I argued, in my own selfish philosophy, that the chances of his recovery were slight, anyway, and that I had so much at stake. I wanted to cling to the present; it was my desperate hope. All beyond was a blank. What risks would I not run to keep the place I had so strangely won!

A neighboring clock struck the half-hour. I must hurry home: they would be waiting dinner for me; Sylvia would be wondering at my delay.

Then, before I quite knew what I was about, I had poured half of the contents of the vial into the pitcher.

Footsteps along the corridor warned me that they were returning. I thrust my hat on my head and dashed breathlessly out of the room.

Only when I found myself on the corridor

below did I pause to listen. In the tenement everything was as quiet as death; but as I turned away, fainter, sadder than before rose the wailing sound of the song,

“ Art thou lonely in thy tomb?
Art thou cold in such a gloom?
Rouse thee, then, and make me room,
Miserere Domine ! ”

Then a cry broke from my lips as I ran out into the night.

CHAPTER VI.

ALMOST A CONFESSION.

" You enter as mysteriously as if you had been making a surreptitious call on a sweetheart," said Aunt Fanny, as I came in late to dinner. " I would say you were in love, if you were not such a cynical and cold-hearted individual."

" Now, Aunt Fanny," said Sylvia, " you mustn't be meddling with Jack's affairs, or the first thing we know he will be flying off to the North Pole or the South Sea Islands. You ought to be grateful if he only takes his meals here."

" My dear, you will spoil him," grumbled the old lady, with a twinkle in her eye. " I am quite satisfied that he must be married to some young lady from the bush, with a wooden ring in her nose, whom he is afraid to present to us, and whom he visits secretly."

I had to laugh with the others, though her badinage did not affect me at all humorously.

"There is nothing half so romantic as a woman in the case," I said. "My calls are on a most unpoetic-looking Irishman with red whiskers and a wooly voice."

"Perhaps he has a daughter," said Aunt Fanny.

"Yes, I believe he has."

"Ah, I thought so!" triumphantly. "And you are very good friends, I suppose?"

"Excellent! Though I have only seen her once, she insisted on climbing into my lap."

"What!" exclaimed Sylvia.

"Oh, I forgot to say," I smiled, "that the young lady is between four and five years old."

"Oh!" relapsing into silence, with a relieved sigh.

"The Major is not here to-night?" I asked; and I was glad of his absence, because I felt unnerved and dispirited.

"He dines at the Club," said Aunt Fanny.

"The idea of his preferring a parcel of men and a smoky dining-room to a pleasant meal in such a delightful place as this!" said Sylvia, with a shade of sarcasm in her voice.

"You say that as if you envied him," I put in.

"I don't wonder the Major likes a change. I get tired myself of this routine, the solemn silence of a dinner at home. Some night I am going to jump upon the table and dance a fandango among the dishes."

"Oh, Sylvia, how can you say such things!" exclaimed Aunt Fanny, with an attempt to appear horrified. "What will your Cousin Jack think of you?"

"Remind him, I dare say, of the young savages he met in the bush," with a laugh. "Can you wonder I am getting desperate, when never a soul has been near us this week."

"Why, only this morning the rector of St. Innocents and Mrs. Brighton Cashmore called on us."

"They came for money, as usual; they always do, armed with subscription papers and diplomatic smiles. I wonder why it is no one ever comes to see us unless they get paid for the trouble?" with a pout.

"My dear cousin," I put in, "if you want to attract society you must get yourself

talked about. Do something eccentric and expensive. Give an entertainment that will set the gossip's tongues wagging. Everyone will want to know who you are. Once knowing you, I am sure the gate to the sacred circle will always be ajar."

"Delightful!" she cried, clapping her pretty hands together. "Now, you promised when you first came here that you would help me. What kind of an entertainment must I give? A ball—a masquerade?"

"No, it must be something new and striking, or it will attract no attention whatever. Society leaders never have any ingenuity. They go from year to year through the dreary round of balls, card parties, and dinners, and no one ever thinks of producing an innovation. Now and then, tired of seeing each other's faces, they devise a masquerade, but that is the extent of their intellectual endeavor. I must think up something new and startling. A friend of mine gave a card party in the head of the Statue of Liberty, once, but that would be too eccentric under the circumstances."

"You have been so much on the continent,

why can we not reproduce some entertainments you have attended there."

I thought a moment, and then added : "I have it ! The weather is just cold enough ! We will have a fox hunt on skates."

Both Aunt Fanny and Sylvia looked aghast.

"What !" they exclaimed, in one breath.

"A fox hunt on skates. The most exciting sport in the world, I assure you. I attended one on Lake Malar, near Stockholm, when I was in Sweden. At intervals along the edges of the lake were ranged men and dogs to keep the fox from taking to the woods. The lake was several miles long and dotted with islands, where the fox would seek refuge when pursued by the dogs. A light layer of snow on the ice gave him a foothold when running—we had a glorious day!"

"I should be afraid the fox might turn back and bite me," said Aunt Fanny, with a shiver. "You don't mean to say ladies enjoyed this sort of thing?"

"Why, bless you, they were the most enthusiastic members of the party. Swedish women are the best skaters in the world. They are never seen to better advantage than

when skimming over the ice, their cheeks, generally so pale, flushed a ruddy rose color, their eyes flashing in the cold air."

"You seem to be enthusiastic on the subject of the Swedish ladies," said Sylvia, with a pout. "Well, the fox hunt let it be. I will consult with Mr. Rossiter about the invitations. It will be a novelty, anyway. Since you made the proposition, you shall arrange the other particulars. What will be the next step after the fox hunt?"

"Let us not borrow trouble of the future," I remarked, sagely. "You will find your quiet home life here, with the visits of a few friends, preferable to swinging monotonously around the circle."

"Still, I don't see the use of having money if you can't enjoy it," writing on the table with her finger in an absent-minded way.

"Well, the question arises, is it necessary to be one of a crowd in order to enjoy money?" with some asperity.

"I suppose you agree with Omar Khayyám :

'A book of verses underneath the bough,
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread—and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness.
Oh, wilderness were Paradise enow ! '

with a laugh, as she quoted the lines.

"Well, it would depend a good deal on the thou whether the wilderness became a Paradise. I should not care to be left there with some people I have met."

So we joked with each other throughout the meal, I trying very hard to talk, to make conversation, because it helped distract my mind from the memory of the man at Fogarty's. I had no appetite. I felt a sense of oppression. I wanted to get out doors and be alone with my thoughts, and so I hardly gave heed to what I was saying, but rattled on in a brainless sort of way, surprising both Sylvia and her aunt by my peculiar, nervous way of speaking.

I was glad when the dinner was over. It had been a terrible ordeal to sit in the glare of those lights and try to appear comfortable and at my ease, while all the time a dreadful picture rose before my eyes, and in my ears were ever ringing the incoherent ravings of a maniac.

When Aunt Fanny had gone up to her room to write a letter, Sylvia and I returned to the drawing-room—I slowly and wearily,

she dancing on before me, a vision of grace, humming gayly to herself.

I was glad that the parlor was dimly lit, or she might have read in my guilty face a premonition that something unusual had happened to me.

I sat down in the shadow, suddenly overcome with a consciousness that I had done something shameful and beyond atonement. The excitement generated by hopes of success had all disappeared. I felt as if my support had been withdrawn. I was weakly conscious of my sin, and shuddered miserably in my corner, thinking of the dreadful life I had condemned a fellow-being to live—an unfortunate man, whose only crime had been unconsciously to cross my path. Sylvia was twirling around on the piano stool, pausing now and then to strike a few lively notes in the treble, that seemed to be in tune with her spirits.

After my idle chatter at the table, she looked at me now and then curiously, as I sat silent in my corner, with my thoughts far away.

As I did not speak, she stopped turning on the stool and confronted me.

"Jack, you have something on your mind," with an air of authority.

"Something very light then," I said, with a faint laugh; "otherwise my mind would not sustain the burden to-night."

How lovely she looked in that clinging white-cashmere dress, as soft and billowy, in its trimmings of lace, as foam of the sea—an Iceland goddess, fashioned out of snow! How I longed to kneel down and worship her!

"No evasions," she said, with a pretty wrinkle of her smooth forehead. "I have noticed for several days past that you have been fretting over something. I believe that you are getting tired of us here; that you long for your old adventurous life again."

I made a deprecating gesture, but she did not appear to notice it.

"I cannot blame you," half sadly. "For a man of the world our life must be stupid indeed. You are used to excitement, to live in a gay atmosphere. We have none of it here."

I thought—it may have been fancy—that her eyes filled with tears.

"My dear girl," I said, earnestly, "I will not deny that of late I have been worried. Some time—not yet—you may learn the reason. It has been my dearest wish that I might end my days here, for here I have known the happiest hours of my life."

"You—you speak as if the time were near at hand when you must leave," striking a few plaintive chords on the piano. "Aunt Fanny was as quick to notice your restlessness as I. She—" hesitating.

"Well?"

"Of course, it's a very absurd conjecture," looking at me long and earnestly. "She thinks that perhaps somewhere—" another pause.

"I am listening."

"Why, that there might be somebody that you liked a good deal better than you do us—some one whose face beckoned you away."

As I did not answer, she went on.

"Confess, now, that you have not been wandering all these years through the world without falling desperately in love with somebody."

Her face is turned towards me now eagerly, and I am almost tempted to tell her all—my deceit, my love for her, everything, everything! But I nod my head with mock solemnity:

“I must confess, I have met one young lady in my travels, for whom I feel an uncommon fondness.”

She is not looking me full in the face now; hers is half averted, and her fingers are wandering over the keys.

“And is she very, very beautiful?” she asks, after a moment’s silence.

“So beautiful, that all my thoughts flow like the measures of a song when I think of her; so pure, that I dream of higher things whenever her memory fills my heart.”

“What a silly question for me to ask you!” picking nervously at the lace on her dress. “Of course she is a paragon of beauty and virtue, or you would not love her as you do.”

I thought a sigh was smothered in the chord she struck on the piano, but I may have been mistaken.

“I suppose I shall see her some day?”

“I do not know.”

She swung around on the stool and confronted me with a surprised air.

“ You don’t know !”

“ I have never had the courage to speak to her of love,” I said, earnestly.

“ Oh, what a goose ! Why not ?” thrumming gently again in the treble.

“ You want to know ?”

“ Why should I ask ?”

“ Because I don’t think I am worthy of her.”

She burst out laughing.

“ Now I know you are smitten, and badly too. Humility is the first and most serious sign of a bad attack. Not worthy of her, you say, my dear Jack ? Why, you are worthy of any woman !”

“ You say that to be kind. I am sure, if I were to tell her what an idle, dissipated dog I have been, she would turn from me in disgust ; she would hate me if she knew but half my history.”

“ Why, have you really been such a hopeless scamp ?” she asked, with a twinkle in her eye. “ One would think, to hear you talk, that you had run the gamut of all crimes, par-

donable and unpardonable. I am getting to be afraid of you," drawing herself away with a pretty gesture, and folding her hands over her bosom. "Really, I don't know whether it is safe for me to be sitting here in the same room with you alone."

"It is running a great risk," I add, with bitter emphasis. Oh, if she knew everything, she would draw away from me in sober earnest.

"So you are afraid to speak to her—to tell her your love—because you have been such a bold, bad man?"

I nod.

"Don't you believe, Jack, that she will hate you just because you have sown a few more wild oats than your neighbor. No woman is going to throw a man over, if she really loves him, just because he happens to have been a little wild. There is a certain proportion of devil in every man, I believe; and sooner or later it must come out. Better before marriage than after, I should think."

She rattled off the sentences nervously, with an attempt to appear at ease. I saw she was

stirred, by what I had said, more than she cared to acknowledge.

"Why, you little parlor philosopher!" I cried, with an affected gayety, "you don't mean to tell me that you would marry a man who had gambled and drunk and associated with queer people for years?"

It was a question I had longed to ask her before this; but no such opportunity had offered itself.

"It would depend a good deal on the man," she said, after a moment's pause. "I should first want to find out if his love for me was stronger than his love for the world, the flesh, and the devil. Often a woman's love supplies the missing support in a man's moral nature; many have been ruined just for the want of it. I don't suppose that you, for instance, sought out a wild life and wilder companions. You were thrown among them and could not resist the temptation."

"Sylvia, you have said it. My life has been a failure because there was no hand reached out to point me towards the right road."

"Poor Jack!" said Sylvia, sympathetically.

"I'm afraid we—that is, my father, was responsible for sending you adrift in the world; but then the provocation was great," shaking her head a little sadly.

I had never been able to find out why Jack Henley had been banished from her father's house, but I had to say something.

"Yes—as you say, the provocation was great. I deserved to be punished. After all, those idle years may not have been wholly wasted. They have made me know the value of a home and what it is to starve for need of sympathy and love."

"Poor old prodigal!" she said, softly, tapping my hand that rested on the edge of the piano. "Well, your troubles are over forever, dear boy. You have found a home and, what is better, a loving heart."

"Found her perhaps to lose her," I murmured, half aloud.

If she hears me, she shows no sign. She dashes off a lively galop on the piano, with nervous, flashing fingers. Her bosom heaves tremulously, I can see by the way the laces are stirred, and about her mouth there is a quivering contraction.

She pauses in the midst of a brilliant *finale* and wheels around on the stool, facing me again. Her face is very calm, and yet it seems to me it is very pale. Perhaps the lamp by the piano, with its blue shade, gives her face such a ghastly hue.

"Tell me more—more about her," she says, softly.

"There is no more to tell," I say, almost sadly. "You might laugh at me if I were to tell you all the thoughts that fill my heart when I think of her. Sometimes I feel that she is too pure a memory to mingle with my baser thoughts. And yet I cannot help but dream of her."

"Such devotion is worthy of reward," Sylvia says, with a nervous little laugh. "Don't abase yourself too much before this idol, my dear Jack. She is a woman, after all, though you endow her with the attributes of a goddess. A woman is very apt to take a lover at his own valuation. If he will pose as a rug at her feet and be satisfied if she only deign to step on him, in all probability my lady will look around for some one who aims for higher privileges. Take my advice, O

humble lover ! Summon up your courage. I am sure that, if she knows you as well as I do, she will not doubt your sincerity and goodness, though you have been twice as bad a man as you would make yourself out to be."

The pressure, or rather the reassuring touch, of her fingers upon my arm, the kindly, sympathetic look in her eyes, send the blood coursing through my veins.

"I hope you are right," I said, a little faintly, for it was a struggle to stifle the words that rose to my lips—to restrain myself from falling at her feet and confessing that she alone was the angel of my dreams. I wanted to take her in my arms, and, with my cheek pressed against hers, confess myself the impostor that I was, and trust to her gracious mercy. Then I started, as these thoughts rose rapidly in my mind.

One thing I could never tell her. Of what I had done to-day—my attempt to wreck poor Henley's mind forever. She might forgive the past, with all its sorrowful shadows ; the present, with its deceptions ; but she could not forgive me for trying to ruin this

helpless human being, whose only crime was that he stood in the way of my success.

Since I had spoken with Sylvia, since I had heard her speak of love's forgiveness, I saw what a wretch I had become.

Her fingers were straying here and there over the keys, waking sad and mournful strains from the minor chords; and soon the notes, as if thrilled by my own thoughts, blended into the music of a song—that haunting song that echoed through my brain with dreary reiteration. She sang as he had sung—low, sad, and yet distinct :

“ Art thou lonely in thy tomb ?
Art thou cold in such a gloom ?
Rouse thee, then, and make me room,
Miserere Domine ! ”

I shuddered, thinking of the wild figure I had heard singing those words in the gray room.

What strange fancy had led Sylvia to choose such a song ? Was it part of my punishment that I was to hear that dreadful dirge from time to time through my life, a mournful reminder of my sin ?

"Does my singing sadden you?" asked Sylvia. "Do you remember this song?"

"I have heard it before," I say, feebly.

"It was just such a night as this. You have forgotten, I can see; but I shall never forget. The night before you went away we sat in the parlor at Barrytown; it was not as modern as this, and the piano was old and rickety. I played this dirge. I was sad, because you were going away; and you—your eyes filled with tears."

"Don't—don't—" I exclaimed, starting to my feet; "it is more than I can bear."

She looked up at me, somewhat surprised at my emotion. She misunderstood me. She thought I suffered because of the picture she had revived.

"Yes—I was wrong to recall the past. It will never come back. That was a farewell forever. One lives to remember and one to forget. It is always so in this world," with an echo of grief in her voice.

I felt as if I were choking. The room was whirling around me, as I rose dizzily to my feet.

"I am not feeling quite myself to-night,"

I stammered. "I am poor company for any-one. I will take a walk in the night; the air may do me good."

Before I knew what I was about I stooped and kissed her bare arm. Another moment and I should have poured out a confession at her feet, and the time had not come for that.

She started back as my lips touched her skin.

"Good night," I said, softly, as I turned towards her when I reached the door.

She did not answer. She was staring at the spot where I had kissed her. Whether she was glad or angry I could not determine, for her head was drooping like a broken lily on her breast, and the look in her eyes I could not see.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE DARK.

I WALKED up-stairs thoughtfully to my room, wondering somewhat over the manner in which she had received this first open demonstration of love. It gave me pleasure to think that she was not wholly sorry for that caress, for before this she must have known the secret my tongue dared not utter. Was ever man in such a tormenting position? I knew not how to act. I loved Sylvia, yet I was ashamed to tell her so. I wanted to stay in this house, and yet honor demanded that I should go; and every day my resolution to leave grew weaker.

But I had more serious thoughts and more unpleasant ones vexing my mind just then. I was eager now to get back to Crimmin's Rents and endeavor to undo the work of the afternoon. The excitement of the moment had blinded me to the enormity, to the contemptible cowardice, of my crime. Sylvia had shown me unwittingly a true picture of

myself during that conversation. I must hurry back to Fogarty's; perhaps I might be still in time to save Henley's reason.

I could not take any credit to myself for this tardy repentance. I had tried to drug Fogarty in cold blood. If I was in time to save Henley, Sylvia alone was the one he must some day thank.

Why was I so eager to blot out this cowardly act? Did I think there might come a time when I should enter the confessional and unburden my heart to her? Perhaps so.

There would be a long list of weaknesses to reveal if that hour of explanation were to come—a monotonous story of moral lapses and unsavory details, but, up to the present, no crime or dishonor on that strange record of youthful follies.

What momentary madness had tempted me to act as I had done that afternoon? It was quite evident that I had not passed the rubicon of reformation, that my moral veneering was a very thin coat, or I should never have yielded to the temptation.

As I was going out of the front door, I paused by the parlor and peeped in through

the half-parted curtains on the scene I had just left. Sylvia was still seated by the piano. But her fingers no longer strayed among the keys. She was leaning forward, her face half hidden by her hands ; and from the quivering of her white shoulders I could see that she was sobbing softly to herself.

I did the best thing possible under the circumstances—I incontinently fled. If I had lingered, if I had given way to the impulse of the moment, I should have rushed in there and tried to comfort her, and made a still greater fool of myself.

So I took refuge in flight.

Again I asked myself the question, when I found myself in the street, “How long is this going to last?” For the crisis in my affairs, the last act of this strange comedy drama, seemed drawing to a close : a sad one, I feared, for me.

Did she love me for myself alone, or only because I was surrounded with a nebula of romantic memories, a dream of her happy girlhood ? I wanted to believe that the past had nothing to do with it, that personally I

had inspired the love she undoubtedly felt for me.

Was that love strong enough to endure, unshaken, such a confession as I should make to her? I hardly dared hope so. I must be sure, before I took that momentous step, that her faith was on such firm foundation that nothing I might say would change it.

For the present I would say nothing. I had enough to do in keeping off the Major. His suspicions were excited; the thought had often crossed his mind, doubtless, that I was an impostor; but he would think twice before accusing Sylvia's cousin of being a humbug. He was collecting evidence, secretly weaving a snare in which he hoped to catch me at last; but before that time I might have won her heart and carried her away out of his reach forever. Such were the troublesome thoughts that vexed my mind as I hurried through the night, trying to find a way, a satisfactory path through the maze where I had unwittingly wandered, not knowing what I should meet at the end of my journey—a desert, or a garden of delight. Surely, I argued to myself, Providence had some

object in throwing me among these people ; and what other object could it be but that I should fall in love with Sylvia and marry her and be happy forever afterwards.

By this time I had reached the shadowy walls of Crimmin's Rents. I looked up towards Fogarty's room. There was no light there. A sudden fear possessed me, and the thought would shape itself in my mind : What if Henley be dead ?

No, it could not, should not be ! I wanted him to live now. His death would be a bar between my love and me that time could never break away.

I bounded up the stairs. Pausing at Mr. Fogarty's door, I listened for a moment. No sound ! I pushed the door open and entered. On the table was the empty jug, and on the floor lay Fogarty, senseless.

I dragged him towards the light in a fever of trepidation. What if I had given him an overdose of the drug ? I had read of such things in the papers. He might have had a weak heart, which narcotics would affect in a deadly way. The very thought made my own heart stand still.

I lit the lamp with trembling fingers, and with great trouble succeeded in rolling him onto a cot in the corner. His face was ghastly white, with dreadful gray shadows. He lay there as inert as a lump of clay; so still, that a cold sweat of terror broke out on my forehead.

I tore open his shirt and dashed water over his face, but he did not stir. It was terrible! I threw a handkerchief over the closed eyes and contracted mouth, they frightened me so. Then I walked up and down the room in a fever of unrest, unable to remain a moment in the same place. One of the children woke up and began to cry. I soothed it, sang to it, and finally it went to sleep again.

And still the body lay there, inert, motionless. I tore here and there about the room in an agony of mind. Was there nothing I could give him? I opened drawers and cupboards, scattering things about in reckless confusion, breaking dishes, upsetting bowls of strange liquids that dripped dirtily over the floor and furniture. I thought I should go mad, with that body lying there so still in the quiet shadows. I wanted to scream out,

to break the dreadful silence. At last, in the bottom of a closet, hidden among some flat-iron holders, I came upon a bottle of spirits.

A moment more and I was forcing it through his clenched teeth, spilling it in his eyes, and dashing it over his face, for the bottle was shaking in my feeble, nervous grasp.

I pressed my hand to his heart, while my own seemed to stop entirely. Joy! it was beating faintly.

At that moment a wild cry rang down the corridor—a cry that seemed to awaken painful echoes in my thoughts.

Henley! I had forgotten all about him in the excitement of the moment. I looked at the clock; it was several hours past the time to administer the sedative.

There was no time to be lost.

Fogarty was recovering consciousness; I could see that by the flush of color slowly returning to his face.

Without another look at him I took the bottle of narcotic from the mantelpiece, lit a candle, and hurried from the room. My mind had grown strangely calm since I knew that the poor Irishman was out of danger;

but the excitement—the nervous shock—had left me weak as a child. I crawled along the corridor rather than walked. What if I should be too late to do any good here? The thought of being haunted all my life with the shadow of this poor witless creature was a terrible consideration. Involuntarily I hastened my footsteps towards his room.

Unlocking the door, I entered. Everything was still, and my hopes rose accordingly. He was evidently sleeping, and consequently had not passed into that wild condition that the narcotic was intended to suppress. Thank God! I was in time.

The wind, blowing through a broken window-pane, threatened to extinguish the candle I carried. I was compelled to shield the flickering flame with my hand.

The room was as damp and foul-smelling as a grave. I had trouble distinguishing anything by the feeble light. The floor was greasy with slime, and several times I had to reach out for some support to keep myself from slipping. I approached the mattress on the floor cautiously, dreading the sight of that melancholy face and wasted form again.

Then I stepped back with a cry of dismay.
The bed was empty ! I examined the corners
of the room, waving the light above my head.
Henley had disappeared !

As I made this discovery, a terrible cry
sounded from behind me. The light was
dashed from my hand as a shadow fell upon
me.

Two claws were about my throat, and I was
borne to the ground in the grasp of a maniac.

He had seen me enter and had stolen up
behind me, following me here and there as I
searched the apartment, bided his time with
crazy cunning, and then sprung upon me. I
was down, and his long fingers were twined
about my throat like the strands of a rope.
I could feel his hot breath in my face, and
his knee bore down cruelly upon my breast.

Taken at such a disadvantage, I was powerless,
though I struggled hard to free myself
from those strangling, terrible fingers. If I
could only cry out, alarm the house ! But in
that throttling clasp nothing but a sickening
gurgle came from my throat. Soon my arms
fell weakly to my side ; the air grew thick as
blood ; there was a roar as of rushing waters

in my brain ; and then something seemed to give way with a snap, and all was blank.

* * * * *

“ Faith, he'll not attend his own funeral for some time yit, Doctor !”

The morning light was streaming into my eyes. Mr. Fogarty was bending over me anxiously, another man at his side.

“ Where—where is—” I gasped.

“ There !” pointing towards the corner.

Henley was sleeping peacefully on the matress, with a smile on his lips, as if he were dreaming of his boyhood.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO MIDNIGHT CALLS.

I DID not see Aunt Fanny or Sylvia until lunch time the next day. Some explanation was, of course, necessary about my absence ; and it was very easy to satisfy their minds without deviating from the truth in any particular. I had watched at the bedside of a delirious friend all night, and hence had been unable to get any sleep myself. Everybody was interested and sympathetic, except the Major, who coughed suggestively and smiled at me in a sardonic manner.

As a wise precaution I had twisted a silk handkerchief around my throat to hide the marks of Henley's terrible fingers. A sore throat, I explained ; the result of that miserable vigil in a damp room, near a loose window.

I took care all the afternoon to keep out of everyone's way. I was sick and miserable, and a little afraid that the Major might at-

tack me in this hour of weakness and get me in an awkward corner.

Aunt Fanny and Sylvia were sensible and comforting, and while proffering their sympathy and help, should I need it, did not pester me with wearisome attentions.

I slipped away to my room after dinner, thinking that I would lie down on the lounge and read myself sleepy ; but I could not get interested ; I was continually looking over the top of the cover of the book at the wall beyond.

There the force of my imagination continually cast a photograph of Sylvia, and it seemed that her arms were outstretched towards me, and that there was a smile of welcome on her lips, as if she were calling me to her feet.

I threw the book away. There was no thinking of anything else as long as this vision persistently lingered near me. There was more pain than pleasure in dreaming of her now. We were as far remote from each other as the star and the palm.

I slipped on my coat and went down into the parlor. Everything was dark there. It

suited my mood, so I did not light the lamps. I knew the disposition of the furniture perfectly, so I moved here and there through the dark, feeling my way around slowly, half in a dream. And as I shifted here and there in the gloom, like a blind man, I thought of the many times Sylvia and I had sat together in the twilight, while she sang to me, in a low, sweet voice, songs that stirred passionate vibrations in my heart, and set me dreaming of an impossible future.

It would be no easy task for me to break away now from the gentle influence I had felt in this quiet home, pointing me to a higher life. I had stayed too long—too long.

I sat down at the piano in the dark, and my fingers crept slowly over the keys, stirring soothing sounds from the vibrant strings.

There was a song I had written years before to please a friend. The words rose almost unconsciously to my lips, for they voiced the feelings of my heart as I sat there and dreamed of her—of Sylvia.

Faint with feeling, I sang the words I had penned when love and loss were vague and meaningless sounds in the ears of the idle

vagabond who uttered them. I sang them now with all my soul in the lines, as if to her alone my voice was raised :

It may be that you do not love me, sweet.
I dare not ask this question at your feet,
Lest I should learn the bitter truth, and know
The secret of your heart, which bids me go.

So let me dream my dream.

Better it should be so,
Better to doubt than know !
To doubt than know !

It may be that you play a subtle part ;
That every tender glance is studied art ;
That you but mock me with your laughing eyes,
In witchery of words, and soft replies.

Let it be so, dear heart.

Still shall my fond trust grow.
Better to doubt than know !
To doubt than know !

And though there comes a time when we must
part,
In memory I'll love you still, sweetheart.
So, let me dream my dream, though faith should
die,

And trust you ever, till that last good-bye.
Whether 'tis long or brief,
Still would I love you so.
Better to doubt than know !
To doubt than know !

The last notes of the song quavered painfully, as if an old man were singing. I was aware of a choking sensation in my throat, and a dimness of vision that I could appreciate even in that dark room.

What a silly baby I was getting to be, breaking down over a song just because it recalled a certain person I had conceived an insane fondness for! I ought to go and scourge myself in my room, like an anchorite in his cell, for having given way to dreams of love and beauty.

"Oh, Sylvia—Sylvia," I murmured, "if I only believed you loved me," with a choking sob.

What was that? Something stirred in a far corner. Had the Major been hiding there in the dark, chuckling with grim delight while I made a fool of myself for his edification?

I raised my head and listened. I was not alone. The air seemed stirred with invisible wings. Something—somebody was approaching me. I reached out my hand to seize it, when—I felt warm lips pressed against mine with lingering sweetness. The rustle of garments. I was alone again. Sylvia! I did

not need to see her face to face to assure myself that it was she who had risen out of the gloom to answer the passionate prayer in my song. I suppose she had been sleeping on the sofa in the corner, and that the music had aroused her.

Sleep that night was out of the question. I did not care to make the attempt. The delicious unrest I experienced gave me time to dream of her—of her! Asleep, I might lose myself in other dreams and miss the perfume of her presence, that seemed to linger near and about me as I walked up and down the room.

I even hesitated to move my lips, lest I should lose some of the lingering pressure of that kiss, the very memory of which sent the blood leaping through every vein. So to keep the picture before me and renew the pleasure of that supreme moment, I moved softly here and there with half-closed eyes, feeling again those soft arms about my neck and that warm mouth pressed against mine.

Women had kissed me before this; I had not lived in the world so many years without knowing the passionate power of pretty lips.

And yet Sylvia's kiss was like none other that I had ever known. It was pure as a benediction, a stamp of sanctification, that pervaded my spirit with a heavenly calm. My eyes, touched by the holy oil of love, saw with clearer vision than ever before. I looked back at my past with shuddering regret. A great desire swelled up in my heart to make the future atone for the past, to live so that Sylvia might think of me, at least in years to come, as a pleasant recollection and not a contaminating memory.

So it had come to this ! The dream I dared not hope would come true was a vivid, glorious reality. And yet the sting was there just the same. I had no right to enjoy the feast of love spread before me. I must go away as I came, still hungering and thirsting for that which never could be mine.

Too long already I had lingered in this fool's Paradise, sipping the sweets that only created a greater thirst in my heart, stealing the joys that never should be mine.

Was ever man so cruelly tempted as I ? It was so hard to break away from love and a home for the bleak, friendless world again.

To go away alone, to resume my old, weary wanderings. But it must be done, I was resolved. Alone! Alone! What terrors the word held for me now, since I had begun to taste the joys of living and of being loved.

How bitter hard it was to make up my mind to go away! And yet the thing must be done, and quickly. Already I had taken a cowardly advantage of my position to wound poor Sylvia, and returned her hospitality with ingratitude. Pity it was I had not perished in the flames that night, before I broke in upon the calm happiness of this little household!

It might have been better in the end for us all. Sylvia loved me! Sylvia loved me! The words kept running through my brain like sad, sweet music. Sad, because she must know so soon how I had deceived her, and then she must hate me.

It might be, I thought, that she really loved the old Jack Henley of her childhood, and not the vagabond who had taken his place. All the years the wanderer had been away she had nursed the memory of her boy sweetheart, and her love for him had grown

uncared for and alone, while he was roaming about the world.

She was of a romantic nature, and her love for me was built out of old memories and dreams. And yet it pleased me to think that she loved me for myself alone, and not because I bore the name of the shadow she worshipped.

If the Major had not appeared, I think I should have had the courage to have remained there and braved it out. At present he had only a suspicion, but the eyes of a lover are keen, and he was only waiting for a favorable opportunity to unmask me. Before that time I must go, slink away into my desolate world again, though all the longing of my heart cried piteously for home, for rest.

But I would not go yet, not yet. A little longer of this peace and love to cherish in the weary years that spread before me like a dreary desert sand.

There was just enough firelight for me to see the piano where she had leaned while I had sung to her so often, with her face resting on one pink little palm and her eyes dreamy as misty stars.

And I leaned back in the soft plush chairs and rehearsed those scenes all over again and again in my mind. For the indistinct light aided my illusion, and again I smelt the faint perfume of the roses at her breast, and felt her warm, sweet lips laid soft as a caress against mine.

"Oh, Sylvia!" I murmured, with half-parted lips, "when shall I find strength to break away from you—to leave your life and love forever?"

Lulled by the warmth of the fire I fell to dreaming of my luckless fate, wondering how my life would have been ruled if I had had Sylvia's lily hand to guide me through the shifting sands. In that atmosphere, which seemed still sweet with the perfume of her presence, I formed strange, mad projects for the *finale* of my strange story. I would run away with her and leave Henley to his fate; I would confess my deception and kill myself at her feet; I would—

Then I opened my eyes wide. There was certainly something moving by the piano. I caught the outline of a human figure. Could it be that Sylvia had returned? Had she

come here to dream again about that scene, which was a sweet and yet a bitter memory to me? Or had my brain, filled with thoughts of her, conjured up a phantom to remind me how illusionary were my hopes? I sat very still in the gloom, wondering now, and very wide awake.

The shadow flitted here and there noiselessly, stooping, crouching; but it was not a woman's step, it was a man's.

I thought of the Major. But that was hardly possible. He was tall, and this figure seemed broad and short. A breath of fresh air blowing in my face settled this surmise. The midnight visitor had come in from the garden.

I watched him approach a secretary in the corner, a dainty affair belonging to Sylvia, of ebony, inlaid with ivory. The visitor flashed a lantern over it, nodded his head as if satisfied with its appearance, and took some tools out of his coat pocket.

Then, setting his lantern down where it would shine on the secretary, he proceeded to work.

At the first scratch of the chisel I started.

He was about to commit a sacrilege on something belonging to Sylvia; that was enough for me. I felt angry to think that a burglar—a common, dirty burglar—should dare to tamper with the possessions of my darling.

He was so interested in his work, and the soft carpet so muffled the sound of my footsteps, that he did not hear my approach. I had made my plans and I lost no time in executing them.

Hastily slipping a silk handkerchief over his throat I dragged him back, twisting the ends together like a tourniquet, and pushed him towards the fire. His struggles were feeble. Every time he moved I gave the ends of the handkerchief a twist, so finally he chose to lie still. I did not want the wretch to die on my hands, so I tied his hands behind his back and removed the tourniquet from his throat.

"Well, what next, governor?" he coughed out, blinking towards the fire and squirming into a more comfortable position.

"I shall help you to your feet in a few moments and march you to the nearest police station, if you want me to be explicit."

He half rolled over towards me, and seemed to be trying to look at my face in the dim light. Then he rolled back with a groan, and lay silent for a little while looking into the fire.

“I say, governor?”

“Well.”

“Do me a favor, will you now?”

“What is it?”

“One of the chisels is in my breast pocket. It’s a cuttin’ my inwards dreadful. Would you mind just taking it out?”

He pleaded so piteously that I saw no reason why I should not oblige the poor devil.

“In my breast pocket,” he repeated, as I leaned close over him, so close to his face that I could see his wicked little eyes glaring at me. I found the chisel at last and removed it from his pocket.

“Thanks,” he croaked. “It’s a pleasure to get nipped by a tender-hearted cove like you;” and a sound like a chuckle came from his lips. I lit a cigarette and stirred him up with my foot.

“Come now, up you go. We must be on our way. If you try to escape I shall put a

bullet through you." I had no pistol, but I thought the threat would answer.

He did not show any signs of moving, and I repeated what I had said, this time in a threatening tone.

"I'm very comfortable where I am, thank you," he said, with a leer.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you want me to yell it all over the house, what I mean?"

I looked at him in a fright.

"Take a good look while you're at it," turning his face towards the light. "It's too pretty a mug not to remember," with that disagreeable chuckle again.

"I have never seen you before."

"Haven't, eh? Ha! that's good! Never seen me before?"

"I have never seen you before. Come, enough of this nonsense! March!"

"You was never in the Hole-in-the-Wall at Holborn, I suppose?" he returned, with an air of playful badinage.

"Yes, as a visitor. What has that got to do with the present circumstances?"

"Well, it's got a good deal to do with the

question, as you will perceive, my bantam cock. You used to be a dealer in that shop. Yes, you can shiver if you want to, but it's true as gospel. You was dealer there, and I was a runner for the house. You knew Biggler in those days well enough, and didn't mind takin' a nip o' gin or 'alf-and-'alf with him, after we closed the lay-out for the night. Take a look again—I am Biggler ;" and he lay on his back and grinned, till I could see every broken tusk in his head, gleaming like a stray dog's in the fitful light.

I recognized him. I was prepared to, so I could conceal some of the fear this man's presence inspired me with.

" Well," I said, as calmly as I could, after taking a mental survey of his unattractive face and figure, " suppose you are Biggler ; supposing I recognize you ; what then ?"

" Why, supposing you let me go," grinning again.

I looked at him, but there was something terribly in earnest about the expression of his mouth now. The smile had utterly disappeared. I began to think I liked it better than the frown.

"We may as well understand each other, old man," he began, familiarly. "I've got as much right in this house as you, and you know it."

He looked me over triumphantly and wagged his head.

He was right, this blackguard ; there was no denying it. I shivered there in the darkness as he continued:

"We was pals once, you and me, but I don't insist we need be on the same footin' now. You've feathered your nest, that's plain to be seen. I don't blame you for that, and I won't be so ungentlemanly as to inquire where you got yer feathers. You always was fixy and smart, and might have made an A1 cracksman if you hadn't been such a softy. Now, jest ontie the handkerchief, will you?"

"Is that a threat?" I asked, a little sulkily.

"A threat, no ; it's a polite request—such as one gentleman should make to another."

"Why, you impudent rascal, I—"

"Not so loud, my boy ; not so loud. For you see you might bring the house down on

our heads, and then I should be compelled for to make some awkward explanations, don't ye see? as might surprise these good folks."

"Why, you dog, I could strangle you as you lie there, then pitch you into the street, and no one would be the wiser."

"But you won't," calmly.

"Why not?"

"Because, my pigeon, you never could have the nerve to murder anybody. It ain't in you. You're too soft-hearted. You ain't enough of a villain, and never will be."

I covered my face with my hands and gave myself up to painful thoughts. He was right; I never could bring myself to take a life, even as worthless a one as this man's, who lay at my feet at my mercy. Whatever sins I was guilty of came from a moral weakness to resist temptation, because there was no hand reached out to guide me and I could not stand on dangerous ground without support.

"Get up and go," I said, sullenly, loosening his bonds.

He rose slowly and stretched himself, looking at me curiously the while.

"You ain't a bad un, Mr. Heywood. I allus said you was a brick in the old days, and I'm glad you struck it rich; though I'm blessed if I know the way such things is managed," casting an admiring look around the room again. "The rest of the gang ain't fared so well."

"The Prince?" repeating the thought aloud, though I had not meant to.

"Quod! He got ten years this time. There ain't anything I can do for you?" he asked, looking at me with an air of sympathy as I lay back in the chair in a dejected attitude.

"You can leave me—that is all."

"All right—no offence. Won't take a feller's hand? Well, that's all right." He turned to go, but stood in the middle of the floor, hesitating and twisting his hat nervously in his fingers.

"Well, what do you want?" I exclaimed, angrily.

He stammered awhile.

"I—I—thought as long as I had so much trouble gettin' in here, you might make it worth my while to hurry a little goin' out."

"Oh, you want some money?"

"I ain't pertickler what it is, so it'll buy vit'als. Now this here'll do if you ain't got any small change handy," reaching out as he spoke and taking up a little silver statuette which Sylvia had brought from Paris.

"Drop that, or I'll knock you down."

"Certainly I" meekly laying it down again. "I on'y wanted to save you the trouble of huntin' in your pocket for a bill."

"Here is all the money I have with me now," I said, thrusting some notes into his hand. "Now, in God's name, go!"

This time I pushed him towards the open French windows, through which he disappeared. He jumped lightly down on the grass, and I could see him clearly in the moonlight as he waved me a sardonic farewell. I had scarcely closed the blinds when a soft step was heard in the hall.

"Ah! is that you, Henley?"

It was the Major. What if he had come a few moments sooner? He was looking for commininating evidence against me; here he would have found it.

"I have had an attack of insomnia lately,"

I explained. "It generally lasts for three or four nights. There is no use trying to sleep at such times, so I came down here to smoke myself sleepy."

"I thought I heard the sound of voices here," he remarked, carelessly. His cigar gleamed like a fiery eye turned towards me. I felt as if he were studying my face, though it was too dark to notice the expression.

"Probably the voices came from the street. I had the windows open a moment ago, looking out on the night."

"I suppose that was it. I believe my cigar has gone out, and I don't know where the matches are."

"I'll find them for you."

"Thanks."

I wonder if he notices how my hand trembles as it touches the chandlier. Impossible! he is leaning on the mantelpiece, lighting his cigar by a taper in his hand.

"Often troubled with insomnia?" he asks, languidly.

"It runs in streaks. Generally for three nights in succession I am unable to get more than a few hours' sleep."

"It must be in the air to-night. B'jove, I couldn't catch a wink myself."

Just then half an exclamation falls from my lips ; he turns and looks at me curiously.

"Eh?"

"So foolish!" I stammered. "I picked up my cigarette by the wrong end, and put the fire into my mouth."

"Ha ! a good joke;" but it doesn't seem to amuse him particularly.

Oh, to get him out of the room for a few moments ! What has startled me is a flashing object on the floor near the leg of the chair, where the Major is even now lazily lolling. It is a chisel—a burglar's cold chisel, which that wretch has carelessly left behind him. As I stand there, with that terrible tool before my eyes, I shiver as if its cold edge were piercing my side. How can I get the Major out of the room ? that is the question. I will at least make an attempt.

"Well, Major," with an attempted gayety, "I don't believe you and I will find any sleep here ; we may as well go back to our rooms."

"I shall stay till I smoke my cigar out,"

he replies ; and there is nothing for me to do but add :

“ Well, I may as well linger and keep you company.”

I seat myself again, not in the most amiable of moods, while that devilish chisel glares at me from the shadow of his chair. If he moves he will surely see it.

“ By the way,” he begins, leaning back lazily and puffing slowly at his cigar, “ you and I have knocked around the world a good deal, and been through some queer adventures, no doubt ; we ought to compare notes. I dare say we have done the same things and perhaps been worked by the same crooks.”

This speech I feel is a preliminary to a general pumping as to my past. I resolve to block his little game at once.

“ My dear Major, when I returned from my wanderings, to make my home in this house, I left my past behind me. I have sown my wild oats and disowned my wild acquaintances. I even want to forget that a certain part of my life ever existed.”

He looked a little disappointed at this

speech. It seemed to take him out of his reckoning.

"And will this past allow you to forget it?" he asked, carelessly twisting at the fringe on the arm of the chair. "The past is hard to bury. It sometimes rises to life when we least want it or expect it."

I shivered in spite of myself. Was there not some veiled threat in this remark, simple as it sounded, and nonchalantly as it was uttered? His face was perfectly calm—he seemed oblivious of my presence.

I laughed, to cover my confusion.

"As you say, a wild past may endanger the present; but not in my case. Sylvia and Aunt Fanny know that I have not lived the life of an anchorite during the past five or six years. They know everything—"

"Everything?" he repeated, in his cold, passionless tones, that seemed to thoroughly unnerve me.

"Well, everything that they need know," I added, hastily. Why the devil did he emphasize the word "everything," as if he knew some secret about me that they would not relish hearing? I am actually getting to be

such a coward in this man's presence that I twist his lightest remarks into a warning or a threat. It is childish; I ought to have more courage than this.

He has dropped his cigar. Picking it up his eyes fall on the chisel. I think I can see a triumphant flash in his eyes, as he takes it up in his hands.

"Ha! what might this be?" running his fingers along the steel. "I did not notice this on the floor on my way up to bed."

"Major—"

"Oh, it is yours?" with the sunniest of smiles and a courtly nod.

Our eyes meet. He rises and holds it towards me gallantly, with such a gesture as he might use handing a fan to a coquette.

"No!" I say, "it is not mine."

"Oh! I saw you start as if you recognized it. Since it is not yours—"

"Well," stepping towards him.

"I will keep it as a souvenir of this delightful *tête-à-tête*. It is not often that I enjoy one at two o'clock in the morning—that is, with a man." Smilingly he puts the chisel into his pocket, buttons his coat over it, and

moves towards the door. Involuntarily I find myself almost at his heels.

“Major,” I stammer, idiotically, not knowing what I am to say next.

“Well, Mr. Henley?” pausing lazily.

“You will not stay any longer?”

“No—I have found what I came for—sleep!”

CHAPTER IX.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

It was fortunate for me, perhaps, that I saw very little of Sylvia in the days immediately following that momentous evening, for I needed all my courage to carry out a resolution formed that night; and if she had been more than kind to me I should have faltered and weakened in an hour when I needed all my strength.

It was not any fear of what the Major might do that forced me into this tardy repentance. It was that moment, when Sylvia had kissed me, that my eyes were opened, and I saw instinctively, as by a flash of lightning, what I was and the dishonor of my position.

It would have been easy enough for me to have persuaded Sylvia into a hasty marriage and then put myself out of danger from the Major, but against the cowardice of such an

act my soul revolted. Two things remained to be done as soon as possible.

The highest medical authorities must be called in consultation regarding Henley's case ; then, as soon as everything had been done towards his recovery, I must confess all to Sylvia and go away, never to see her again.

It was a bitter task I had set myself to perform ; but I steeled my heart to make a superhuman effort to carry out my resolution. There was nothing else left for the vagabond to do, if he would retrieve his honor.

Sylvia was now holding daily consultations with the novelist, Mr. Rossiter, regarding the fête she was to give in the following week. The door-bell was constantly being rung by tradesmen and costumers, who joined the solemn conclave. Aunt Fanny might be seen at all hours of the day running aimlessly about the house with her hands full of bills, her dress covered with bits of silk, and a look of hopeless despair on her face.

Mr. Rossiter pooh-poohed my idea of a fox-hunt at once, and offered a suggestion of his own, which I was glad they adopted. A friend of his had erected an ice-palace in front of

his villa on the Hudson, near Yonkers, and had offered it for the occasion to the novelist. It was to be illuminated by electricity, and there was to be a fancy-dress ball given in the hall of snow statues, followed by a banquet. Sylvia was in a delirious state of excitement, and sat up late every night, puzzling over details and estimates about the entertainment. For the time I was forgotten.

Before two days had passed I had summoned in consultation four of the greatest brain specialists in the country regarding Henley's case. Since that night when he had attacked me the poor fellow had sunk into an apathetic state from which it was difficult to rouse him. They decided that an operation was necessary, and that it must be performed at once if the patient's reason would be saved. I will not worry you with the details of this operation, for it would not interest you as much as it did me.

If I had treated poor Henley with apparent indifference before, I certainly atoned for my unfeeling conduct during the fateful hours of his illness. Throughout the day, and often at night, when constant watching was needed,

I was at his bedside, fanning him, singing to him, for he was just like a child, or holding some cooling drink to his lips. More than once, after the oppression of his brain had been removed and he began to show signs of returning intelligence, did I find him looking at me curiously, as if he were puzzled, asking himself where he had met me before.

There was often a gleam of grateful light in his eyes after I had performed any particular kindness ; and then he would fall into a state of thoughtful silence, as if he were at a loss to understand why I should be so good to him. That the operation had been entirely successful was demonstrated by the change in the patient as the days went by. A light shone in the dull eyes that had been lustreless so long ; and when he spoke there was some decision in his voice, as if he had weighed his words before uttering them. I had instructed Mr. Fogarty, who still helped in watching over the patient, to address him always as Mr. Henley in the future, and I prepared a list of questions which he was to ask him every day, that would

aid in strengthening the poor fellow's mind and in recalling the past.

There were times when Henley would deliver such long and thoughtfully constructed speeches that I was almost led to believe that he must be shamming, when again he would look blank and make meaningless remarks.

I took pains not to enlighten him as to my own identity, and I reserved the mention of Sylvia and Aunt Fanny until the day I was to go away from them forever. If he remembered the past at all, he never spoke of it. His mind was like a child's, and the present was all it could grasp in its weakness.

His appearance changed, and he grew stouter and younger-looking as his brain forces gradually resumed their vocations. His hair was still white, but gradually he lost the lean and haggard look that had made him such a terrifying object before. The contrast between the smooth young face and the snowy hair was not unbecoming. Surely Sylvia would have no trouble in taking up the thread of her girlish love story when she came face to face with the true idol of her dreams. She could readily banish from her

thoughts the impostor who had reigned in her fancy for so brief a time, and accept eagerly the homage of the real.

Perhaps she would sometimes feel grateful to the vagabond who, at the last hour, had become strong to retrieve his honor for her sake.

The day of Sylvia's fête dawned cold and clear. Everyone in the house was in a bustle of excitement ; I alone felt sad. To-morrow I was going away ! To-morrow I was to go out of this home where I had known so many happy hours, and become a homeless, friendless wanderer again. Can you wonder that I was sad ? that I took such a faint interest in the babble at the table about the ball, the people who were going, the costumes they were expected to wear ?

I hardly know how I got through the day. If Sylvia had not been so immersed in the excitement of the hour she would have noticed that I was unusually worried about something. As for the Major, he had never appeared so gay and witty ; and, as I was a poor skater, he had Sylvia most of the time to himself, while I dangled along in the back-

ground. To my jealous eyes it seemed that she was flirting with him outrageously—but then I was miserable if anyone looked at her. I wanted to have her all to myself on this, my last day, for it seemed like the last day on earth to me.

The afternoon was waning and night had set in when we reached the ice-palace. Seen through the dark, it gleamed like a temple of silver, with glittering minarets gemmed by hundreds of colored lights that were reflected in the mirror-like walls.

I was aware of entering the hall of statues, where the goddesses of mythology, carved out of ice and snow, supported the arches of this wonderful pleasure-house, and upheld gilt branches of crystal fruit and flowers, in which soft colored lights gleamed in prismatic clusters. There was a whirling kaleidoscope of color, rich dresses, costly furs, and beautiful faces coming and going, here and there, while music echoed through the glittering halls.

But I had no eyes for anyone but Sylvia. When she was not with me, I followed her about and stared at her. Among all the fair

faces present flashing through the crowd I saw only her: the others were mere protoplasm. In vain did I try to rouse myself from the lethargy into which I had fallen and join in the merriment. I felt none of the excitement which seemed to thrill everyone present, and which found expression in laughing eyes and nervous, twinkling feet. In the midst of the dancing I stood apart from all, like the pariah that I was soon to be.

The banquet came, but I could not eat. I was seated next to Sylvia, but I devoured her more with my eyes than what they put on my plate.

My last day and night!

No, it could not be possible that I was going away from her on the morrow—that I was never to see her again. Surely there was some delusion here, and I should presently wake up and find that I had been dreaming, that she was to be mine alone, to be with me always until the end.

Several times she tried to rally me with her kindly smile and a tender little speech, but I am afraid my answers were scarcely coherent. I was thinking of the fateful mor-

row! I was not sorry when the hour came for breaking up; and the palace was illumined with colored fires, and the band struck up a "Good-night" melody. The sight of Sylvia so near me was a menace to my resolution. I thought too much about her and the might-have-been. She shook the structure of my plans that were to find their consummation on the—morrow. It were easier to be miserable alone than enjoy the pleasures of Tantalus in her company.

Some of the party, including Sylvia, were in favor of skating part of the way home, unwilling that the fête should end so early. Some torches were distributed among the men, and so we set out.

As Sylvia glided along in her snowy furs, framed by a halo of ruddy light cast by the flaming torches, she seemed like the spirit of peace, such as had come to me in my dreams one night—that elusive spirit which I was always following, but was never able to overtake.

Songs and laughter enlivened the journey home. On the outside of the merry, moving crowd I swung awkwardly on my skates,

ashamed to enter the circle of light and display my clumsiness. The Major from time to time gave some brilliant specimens of his skill on the ice, and always elicited applause from the company.

No one paid any attention to the dark figure stumbling along in the background. I saw, in a fit of sullen rage, that I was forgotten; and the old melancholy, suicidal thoughts overtook me, and I was again in a world of dreary dreams.

Stumbling over a stick frozen in the ice woke me up. I saw the gleam of the torches beyond. It was moonlight when we set out, but with a rising wind the clouds had shifted. I saw that there was danger of my falling through an air-hole.

"Wait for me," I cried out, at the top of my voice. I had no desire to drop into the black waters of the Hudson, that sped with a booming noise under the ice beneath my feet.

The group of torches sweeping towards the south, like a flock of golden birds, wavered at the sound of my voice calling a second time. One of the mystical flying flames

separated from the rest and came gliding through the air towards me.

"Where are you?" cried a voice—the Major's, and very sulky were its tones.

"Here!" I responded. It was only possible to see a dark figure in the light of the torch.

"Bear away to the left and you'll be all right," he added. "There's an air-hole on the right."

I put forth my best efforts to reach his side. I knew he must be secretly fuming at the delay and be anxious to return to Sylvia's side.

Keeping my eye on the torch flaring in the dark I "bore away," as he had directed me, towards the left.

Suddenly I heard a loud cry. The torch seemed to be wrenched out of his hand and came flying towards me, upborne by a dark figure.

"Stop—stop!" came the call again from the dark.

I halted in amazement. What could be the matter? It was Sylvia who had uttered the wild cry that rang across the ice with

piercing distinctness. Another moment and she was at my side.

"How you frightened me!" I said, as she came up with me. "I thought you were in danger."

"Danger!" she exclaimed, with a pallid face and frightened eyes. "Look! a moment more—you would be there!"

Waving the torch before her, a gaping chasm in the ice yawned at my feet, where the black waters rushed tumultuously together.

CHAPTER X.

TANTALUS.

"SEE what you have escaped," with a shudder of apprehension. She laid one hand gently on my arm and drew me away from the whirling waters. She was all a-tremble with excitement.

"How you frightened me!" she murmured; "I shall not let you out of my sight again to-night."

"It might have been just as well if you had come too late," I said, a little sadly, still staring down into the depths of the waters that seemed to possess a terrible fascination for me at that moment. Then I added bitterly, "I am sure the Major will not thank you for your interference."

"Don't, don't!" she murmured, brokenly; "you hurt me." She laid her hand pleadingly on my arm; when she raised her face the wavering flame of the torch showed that her eyes were filled with tears.

I might have been tempted to say a good deal at that moment, but the Major came up, and in his wake the other skaters, who straightway commenced to ply poor frightened Sylvia with questions.

"Who was killed? What accident had taken place?"

"I hope you are all right," asked the Major, with an attempt at heartiness.

"Yes, thanks to Miss Dene," I replied, coldly. "But for her I should probably be there," pointing towards the fissure in the ice, where the waves were churning noisily. "You do not regret the failure of your amiable intentions," I added, as he turned away from the contemplation with a shudder of apprehension.

"Eh, what's that?" as if he had not heard me. "'Pon my soul, I'm afraid I was a little mixed in directing you. The excitement of the occasion—the chatter—laughing—you know, confused me. You understand?" appealing to Sylvia.

"Yes, I understand," she returned, looking at him fixedly for a moment.

"Anyway," he laughed, "I'm sure it is

worth risking one's life to be saved by you, Miss Dene. Well, now that the remnants of our party have been gathered together again, shall we continue?" offering her his hand.

"Thanks! one narrow escape like this is enough for to-night. What do you say, ladies?" turning towards the crowd; "shall we tempt misfortune any more in the dark, or return home in the carriages?"

A chorus of expostulation from the gentlemen and of entreaties from the women ended, as might have been expected, in a decision in favor of driving home rather than incur any further risks on the ice. I am quite sure, however, that some of the lovers in the party breathed no gentle benedictions on my head for having cut short their skatorial *tête-à-tête* through the dark.

The Major had joined the Rossiters, who were chattering noisily ahead of us. We had the coupé all to ourselves on the way home, but I was still too much shaken from the excitement of that scene on the ice to care to talk, and Sylvia made no attempt to break the silence.

As we entered the house, and I was remov-

ing her cloak at the drawing-room door, she suddenly tottered and would have fallen if I had not caught her in my arms. She was very pale, and her slight form quivered in the grasp in which I held her.

I supported, half-carried, her to a *fau-teuil*, where she lay back with partly closed eyes, breathing with apparent difficulty.

"O Sylvia dear, what is the matter?" I exclaimed, kneeling beside her and chafing her cold hands in mine. "Shall I go for a doctor—you look so pale and ill?"

She opened her eyes, with a smile.

"Stay, stay," she murmured, "near me;" and one trembling hand was laid detainingly on my arm.

I felt all my reserve melting away at the thrill of contact with her fingers. My resolutions to keep away from her were weakening in the light of her eyes, like mists before the morning. I was only a poor, weak, mortal man, and she was beautiful, and I loved her.

"Tell me, Sylvia, what troubles you?" I said, softly.

She looked at me—oh! my heart still

thrills at the memory of that look—and then burst into a flood of tears.

“What is it?” I kept asking her, but she gave me no answer. I suppose the tension on her nerves during that moment of excitement on the ice had proved too much for her, and this was the reaction. Her face was so near me, and her hand trembling upon my arm made me shake like a leaf. Then, my heart—yes, even my brain—stood still, when, a moment after this passionate outburst, she wiped away her tears.

“O Jack, if I had lost you—if I had lost you!” she murmured.

I was insane now. I forgot what I was, what I had been. My resolutions were scattered to the winds.

“Sylvia,” I cried, “were all those beautiful tears for me? You wept because my worthless life was in danger?”

She bowed her head on her breast and smiled through her tears.

“Not worthless, dear Jack. Priceless to me, because I love you—I love you,” leaning towards me, a starry sweetness in her eyes.

“No—no!” I cried, passionately, as her

soft arms were about my neck and I was feebly trying to loosen them. "I am not worthy of you, Sylvia! All my life, my works, have been evil. I have drank, I have gambled, I have been worse than vile; you must not sacrifice your beautiful life for me. You shall not! you shall not!" struggling to break away, to retrieve my lost resolution.

"Yet my life can never be happy without you," she murmured, caressingly, "for you are the light of it, my darling."

And carried away by the luring sweetness of her words I drew her beautiful head to my breast and kissed, again and again, the moist, trembling lips lifted towards me like a thirsty rose towards the sun.

"My love! my love!" was all I could say, as my arms enfolded her, and her heart, tumultuous in its throbbing as a frightened bird's, beat against my own.

The past was a blank. I was living in the ecstasy of the present. Her kisses seemed to fall like grateful rain in the parched desert of my heart. I drank deep of love's delirious measure, for I had thirsted so long, so many weary years. The striking of the clock roused

me. I started as guiltily as if I had been a burglar about to rifle the house. What else was I but a thief, who had stolen into this peaceful home to rob it of its richest treasure?

I loved her. Yes, the good God knew how much; and for the sake of my great love I would give her up. She should not offer up her pure young life on the altar of my ruined youth.

For me the darkness ; for her the light.

I rose to my feet and gently kissed her on the forehead. She laid her hand tremulously on my arm.

“Jack, what is it? Tell me—tell me!”

“Not to-night!” I said, sadly. “To-morrow, Sylvia, you shall know all.”

Then I turned away from the room, and my blood seemed to burn me, and my eyes were dim with tears, as I stumbled out into the night, with no idea where I was going. My brain was in a whirl of conflicting thoughts. What right had I to mention my love to her—I, the vagabond, the outcast? And yet the love I bore her was reverential; she could not resent it, even if she knew the

whole truth. Surely the meanest beggar has a right to worship in the shrine of his choice.

The night air cooled my blood, but it could not soothe my restless brain. I knew that the hour of my great renunciation was at hand. To-morrow she should know everything. Out of her life and home I should disappear forever. The great vortex would swallow me up; I should again be a bit of drift-wood, whirling aimlessly about in the maelstrom.

Oh, how bitter the thought was to me, that out of this little Eden of peace I must pass into the wilderness again, and suffer the hunger of love—more keenly for these hours with *Sylvia*!

The agonies of Tantalus were mine. To have had the cup so near my lips—so near, and then be compelled to dash it down, just as my lips pressed the rim!

But why need I go away? something spoke within me; why need I go away?

Sylvia would marry me, and during the honeymoon I might tell her everything.

No! I put the thought from me reluctantly, but firmly. A few months ago I might have

been guilty of deceiving her, but now my heart revolted at the thought.

I loved her so well that I could sacrifice myself for her sake. If, after all, it was the memory of Henley she worshipped, when I had restored him to her safe and well she would at least think of me kindly for what I had done.

And I had labored hard for many days, and spent sleepless hours, talking and questioning, and trying to awaken poor Henley's brain, which was slowly but surely recovering from its awful shock.

In a few days, the doctors thought, it would be safe to take him to Sylvia's home. In that familiar atmosphere, surrounded by his relatives, his mind would soon regain its power.

Unconsciously, while I was thinking over my melancholy fate, I had wandered in the direction of Crimmin's Rents, and now stood in the shadow of those gloomy buildings. The red-haired lady, who seemed a fixture of the court, was rolling around the fountain in a high state of exhilaration, and yelling that she would have a certain person's heart out

before morning. She seemed to have a monomania for securing a collection of hearts.

Seeing me, she hastened forward, with a howl, but I fled incontinently up the stairs, and from the landing above I could hear her muttering, below, her renewed intentions of securing somebody's heart: this time, I believe, it was mine. I made my way through the dark, foul-smelling corridors, to Mr. Fogarty's room. He was not in, so I pushed on to Henley's apartment. The Irishman met me at the door, with his finger on his lips—

"He's shlapin' as swate as a babe on its mother's brist," he whispered. "It 'ud be a pity to disturb him."

"I didn't intend to," I said. "Go and take a nap yourself, Mr. Fogarty," for I saw the honest fellow looked tired out. "I have come to watch here with him for a while."

"Oh, I'm not at all shlapy," he protested, though he could hardly keep his eyes open.

"Still, you won't be the worse for a few minutes' sleep," I added, gently. "Come now, do as I say, or you will break down yourself."

"Well, it's only for five minutes," he said, yawning in spite of himself; "only for five minutes."

"Yes, five minutes!" for I knew that, once asleep, he would not wake until morning, and I proposed to let him have a good night's rest. He needed it, poor fellow!

"Yer always thinkin' of other people's comfort before yer own," he said, turning towards me with an expression in his eyes like a grateful dog's. "Good-night, sur, and God bless ye," shuffling out of the door.

"Amen," I said.

The room was very still. Only from the court below came an occasional cry and the sound of a drunken man growling in the dark. I turned towards the sleeping man. He was lying on his cot half dressed, and as the light of the flaring candle fell across his face I could see how the light of reason was restoring some of the youthful grace of expression to his features. He looked younger by many years than when I had first seen him, standing by this window, crooning that dreadful dirge that still haunted me with its melancholy cadence.

As I leaned over his bed he seemed to smile in his sleep ; and, listening still closer, I heard him breathe her name—Sylvia's, and I turned away with something of the old bitterness in my heart, and tears of regret in my eyes—a sullen feeling of anger, thinking of his future and mine. Why was he to be happy in her love for all time, while I was condemned to live forever in the dark ? Again were we reversing places. He was nearing the light, the dawn that presaged a long bright day, while my night would last forever.

How I suffered through those midnight hours, as I sat by the bedside of the man who was soon to reap the one flower in the desert of my life !

Evil thoughts and good mingled in my mind throughout that lonely vigil. My evil nature was fighting for pre-eminence ; again wild schemes coursed through my troubled mind. I could not see any future without Sylvia. I must—I must have her ! There was no life without her—nothing but blank despair. O God ! how hard it was to give her up !

Once during the night I was compelled to awaken the sleeper to give him his medicine. He looked at me but said nothing, and a moment later was sound asleep again.

I opened the shutters and looked out on the night. A yellow mist hung over the city, the presage of a gloomy day. Beyond some far housetops a light twinkled like a star from the top story of a high building, and I fancied to myself that it was in Sylvia's room it shone. For I could not get her out of my mind for even a moment. Her face haunted me, until I thought the sight of it would drive me to a more fatal madness than poor Henley had ever suffered.

From every corner of the room her soft blue eyes peered out at me, and from the murky heavens I heard the sound of her voice, the whisper of her floating robes in the murmur of the wind about the eaves. Was I always to be haunted with her presence? I thought, with a shudder. I felt that, if she would only come to me in these dreamy moments with scorn in her eyes and hateful words on her lips, I should not suffer so at the sight of her face.

But it seemed to me that in all these waking visions her lips were smiling, her eyes warm with the light of love, and her hands outstretched as if to welcome me to her arms.

Then the old wicked thoughts came back to me, fight them as I would—the old temptation, to win her in spite of all ; to make her mine ; to know the power of her love for a week, a day, an hour, even if she hated me in the end.

No ! no ! no ! I would not deceive her, though my life's happiness were the forfeit. My memory, at least, should not sadden her thoughts in the years to come. She would understand that my great renunciation was all for love of her ; she would know the nobility of a love like mine, which gave all and asked for nothing but to be remembered—a love which held her happiness first.

This act of self-abnegation I felt would raise me in her esteem ; it would temper her mercy when she knew the truth ; and perhaps she would forgive the poor wanderer who had found his way unwittingly into the peace of her home, and who must go forth alone into the world again, more weary, perhaps, be-

cause the burden was harder now to bear, but purer in heart because of her sake—a vagabond still, but a vagabond not lost to honor.

“O God,” I said, stretching my hands towards the sombre skies, “give her from Thy bounty enduring love and peace. Let happiness rest on her home forever, and have mercy on me, a sinner.”

I bowed my head on my hands and wept from the fulness of my heart.

“Hope! hope!” said a voice close at my side. I looked up! The man on the cot was still sleeping, and yet I was sure it was his voice that had whispered those words in my ear.

“Hope?” I murmured, vacantly. “What hope is there for me?”

But when I turned I saw that the yellow mist had blown away, and that the radiance of morning filled the room with glory

CHAPTER XI.

GOOD-BYE, DEAR HEART.

GOING away !

This was the one thought that was ringing in my brain as I crept home that morning and flung myself on my bed to snatch a few hours' sleep. And in my troubled dreams, with dull reiteration some one seemed to be shrieking in my ear a command to be gone, until at last I woke with a shiver to hear the sound of Sylvia's voice at my door, calling out that they were waiting breakfast for me.

I have never been able to understand how a man about to be hung can make a comfortable meal in the very shadow of the gallows. I was only condemned to a lonely exile, yet the sight of that really tempting breakfast possessed no allurements for me that morning whatever.

“Feeling a bit seedy?” asked the Major, with an air of affected sympathy,

"Slept badly," I returned, looking down at my plate.

"I met you last night," after a pause.

"Indeed!" I said, conscious that my face was flushing a little. "I cannot remember seeing you."

"No, I suppose not. It was rather a dark street, in front of a bunch of tenement-house buildings called 'Crimmin's Rents,' I believe."

Aunt Fanny and Sylvia looked up with an expression on their faces, as much as to say, Now we shall have something startling.

I did not believe that the Major had seen me at all; yet how did he come to know of Crimmin's Rents, or that I ever visited there? Evidently he had followed me some day in a spirit of curiosity to spy on my movements. I was going away, and there was no need to be alarmed now. I had no trouble in assuming a calmness of manner when I spoke again:

"I often go there when I have time. A poor invalid is living there who was injured in the fire. I have been able to do him a good many small services, and he is very grateful. But what could have taken an exquisite like you into such a miserable neigh-

borhood?" I was unable to resist the temptation of a parting dig at my old enemy.

"Oh, well, you see," he stammered, with a slight flush of color in his cheeks, "after the dinner was over last night some of the boys wanted to go slumming, and of course I had to join in. Some funny beggars we met, too, by the way. Attended a meeting of the Cripples' Club. To be eligible to membership you must have lost a limb; and the more of a remnant you are, the higher office you hold in the society and the larger percentage you draw of the revenue. The President had no arms, and wrote with a pen held by his toes, that were daintily clad in black-silk mitts. The most reverenced and respected member of the fraternity was an old man brought in on a board and perched on a pedestal in the corner. He had neither legs nor arms, and seemed to be thrust into a broadcloth sack gathered about his throat. I had such a fit of laughing at the sight of this object that some of the remnants wanted to put me out."

"Oh, if Mr. Rossiter could have been there,

what a realistic revel he would have enjoyed among those strange creatures!" said Sylvia.

"I chatted with some members of the Club—some memberless members, I might say. Ha! not bad, really. It was a good idea, you see, for them to band together for mutual protection. I spoke to the gentleman in the sack suit, and he spoke very feelingly of his departed legs and arms, that were buried in various places about the country. You might have imagined it was about members of his family he was discussing, to see the tears in his eyes."

"Some day you must take me around among these queer people," said Sylvia.

"Do you know that the poor and miserable are a great deal more interesting than the sleek, the well-fed, and the happy?"

"Yes, perhaps, to study at a respectful distance," drawled the Major. "I don't care to be interesting myself in the way you mention."

"But it does seem to me," said Sylvia, eagerly, "that prosperity makes people stupid. Rich food dulls the intellect, if they have any, and indolence kills their ambition

to rise above the crowd. The emotions are stupefied by a golden soporific, and they soon become nothing but automatons, obeying certain social restrictions, and going through a series of performances set by custom and fashion."

"Bravo!" said the Major, clapping his hands together. "What new style of philosopher have we here? I hope, Miss Dene, that you are not a young lady born with a mission to redeem the world."

"No, Major," shaking her head with mock gravity. "When I think how long it would take to redeem you, I see the hopelessness of such an attempt. I may be able to do something, however, to make some one happier."

"That is always in your power," he returned, with a significant smile, that angered me exceedingly.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, you will have to excuse me," broke in Aunt Fanny, with a shade of impatience in her voice; "I have something to do this morning. Major, she used to be useful before you came, but now I can never get her to do anything."

"Why, what do you want me to do?" asked Sylvia, raising her eyes roguishly to her

aunt's face. "Shall I go down to the kitchen and make some pies?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the other, with a qualm of memory. "No! anything but that! I have hardly recovered from the last. Go—go—sew on buttons—on the Major—or anything."

Sylvia laughed as Aunt Fanny, with a humorous air of vexation, hurried out of the room.

The others returned to the parlor, but I did not attempt to follow them. I noticed, with a feeling of sullen rage, that the Major and Sylvia seemed to be on very good terms with each other. I could hear them laughing together as I made my way slowly up-stairs, and the old savage bitterness of feeling revived in my heart. There was one comforting thought, however, in the midst of my misery: I should triumph over his hopes, though it would be on the grave of my own.

He had tried his best to crush me, but in the end he would be buried himself in the ruins of the structure he had builded. I felt a grim delight in thinking that I should not suffer alone—that he would bear me company.

Yet the loss of Sylvia meant a great deal more to me. There was a future for Carriston. He could find among friends a balm for his troubles, and perhaps live to forget his lost happiness; while beyond the present my future was dark with despair. I walked up-stairs slowly, unwilling to think that it was perhaps for the last time. I half closed my eyes so as not to see familiar objects that seemed to speak of her and remind me of past delights and dreams which I should never live again.

Once in my room I sat for a long time looking into the fire, feeling an inertia I could not understand, a hesitation about beginning to prepare for my departure. And yet it was not strange that I should feel this sudden weakness. Beyond lurked dismal shadows, while here it was light and bright, and my soul had a chance to expand in this atmosphere of peace. Here I was loved—yes, loved, though I had won that love by deceit. Beyond, there was no one to care for me—no, not one!

Well, the sooner it was over the better. An outcast I came here, an outcast I should

go forth. There was surely no rest for me this side of the grave. I was fated to wander alone over the face of the earth to the last sad end.

Suicide? Yes, perhaps, after all, death would be more kind to me than life.

Walking nervously to and fro up and down the room I caught sight of Sylvia's picture, smiling down on me from its ivory frame on the wall, and the quick tears rushed to my eyes as I took it down.

"Darling," I cried, "no one will deny me the privilege of kissing you good-bye in this harmless fashion."

What a child the vagabond was becoming, to be sure—holding a picture against his lips, trembling with tenderness, while tears were splashing ruthlessly down on the silent, beautiful face! A child, perhaps, but, oh! it was comforting, in this hour of silent farewell, to kiss even her image that the sun had traced.

I had resolved that I would not see her to say good-bye. I was doubtful of my strength to endure such an ordeal, for I should have to tell her all; and after she had honored me

with her love how could I bear to face her with an explanation of my luckless deception?

I would write what I had to say. She should learn after I had gone far away how I had loved her, how she had lifted me out of the slough of my selfish thoughts and set me again on the firm rock of honor.

For though I went out of this house as I came, an outcast, yet I was not the same man that, a few weeks ago, had opened his eyes on the wonders of this tiny Eden. The same, and yet not the same.

Though love was not for me, there was gain as well as loss. I had gained some new views of life, and had found again some buried hopes of my youth and the aspirations of my early manhood.

Ever since I had known Sylvia, a gradual work of reformation had been silently going on within me. She had made me see myself in my own true light. With clearer vision I foresaw the dangers ahead—the reefs and fatal sands.

No longer should I find pleasure in the same mad follies. The old dissipations held no lure for me now. Though she was never

to be mine in the flesh, her spirit would be with me always, to remind me of what I had lost, and yet to point a warning finger towards the light.

But I must not allow myself the delay of dreams. There was much to be done, and I needed all my strength to carry out my plans to the letter.

Already a coward weakness was stealing over me. I turned her picture with its face to the wall, lest the sight of it might disconcert me, as I made my final preparations to go away.

As I had come into the house, so I would leave it. What money I had spent on myself should be returned. I made out a statement of how every dollar had been spent, and laid it on the bureau in a conspicuous place where Henley would be sure to see it as soon as he arrived. In the same envelope was a detailed explanation of everything connected with my arrival in the house and the assumption of his name; but the attempt I had made to wreck his reason—I could not put that down. The work I had set myself to perform was hard enough without adding that painful in-

cident. The bitterest task I left to the last—my explanation to Sylvia !

How many times I wrote and rewrote the last sad words I was to speak to her in life, while my tears rained down on the paper as I read it over with trembling lips ! And in fancy I could see the startled look in her eyes when they fell upon these words of parting that voiced the sorrows of my soul. Would she weep because she would never see me again, and wish me back, for all that I had deceived her and sought her love by trickery and device ?

But I hurried through with my work, not daring to dwell too much on her memory, lest it should unman me, for there was still much to be done that called for a brave heart.

Even when I stole into the perfumed silence of her blue-satin boudoir, glowing with soft lights and as sweet as the heart of a violet, and left the letter where she would see it, and then beat a hasty retreat—there, where every object spoke of her, and the air was faint with the fragrance of her presence, I felt a sudden weakness overcome me. I was tempted to

wait for her, to throw myself at her feet, tell her of my love, and beg her to be merciful.

As I stood there wavering, the perfume of the place seemed to steep me in a drowsy languor. In the silence of this scented shrine of innocence every dainty object seemed to beckon me to linger.

At last, with a great effort of will, I half shut my eyes and strode hastily out of the room without once looking back. A sigh of relief broke from my lips when I found myself in the street. I was aware of having triumphed again over my moral weakness, and felt a consciousness of growing strength and courage, and an anxiety to finish the tasks I had laid out.

Nothing remained now but to find Henley at Crimmin's Rents, to speak to him of Aunt Fanny and Sylvia, and to lead him to the door of his future home. There I would say good-bye and leave him to the enjoyment of his happiness, while I went out again as I had come—friendless, alone!—a vagabond still!

All the way over to the Rents I kept repeating to myself the words I should say to him, studying how concisely I might con-

vey the information I had to give him ; what I should tell him of Sylvia, of Aunt Fanny ; and how I should keep myself in the background during all these explanations. Time enough for him to learn about me when he had reached his own room and found my letter awaiting him.

I hurried now, anxious to be through with the painful task I had set myself to perform, for I was weary of the world and of everything but sleep.

As I bounded up the narrow stairs of Crimmin's Rents I ran into Mr. Fogarty coming down in haste.

"What is it?" I cried, in alarm, catching sight of his pale face, that was working convulsively.

"Him—him," was all he could say between gasps, pointing above.

"Is anything the matter with Henley?" grasping him by the arm and shaking him fiercely.

"Matter enough ! He's disappeared !"

CHAPTER XII.

AN END AND A BEGINNING.

"WHAT do you mean?" I said, in my excitement taking Mr. Fogarty by the collar more vigorously than kindly. "Did I not tell you before that you must not lose sight of him for a moment?"

"Oh, nothing can have gone wrong with the poor gentleman," adjusting his collar, that had become twisted in the struggle. "Faith, he's as sinsible now as either you or I. Perhaps he's only gone out for a walk. He's took a turn in the court before this, to get some fresh air. I suppose he was nervous bein' shut up so long, and walked out when he got a chance. Will you come up to me room and have a sup of something?" in a conciliatory voice.

"No, leave me! I want to think about the matter," shortly. "I must find him at once."

"Yer—yer not angry, sur?"

"No—no—only go!"

He obeyed slowly, casting reproachful glances at me as he made his way up the stairs. Here was a pretty how-to-do! Henley was gone, and I could no longer carry out my intention. But where had he gone? In search of Aunt Fanny and Sylvia? No, that was not probable. He had forgotten about them; his mind was too feeble at present to look back over the past, and I had never spoken to him about them. Where could he have gone? He placed so much dependence upon me that I could not understand why he should make any move without first consulting me. He was so much like a child that he had seemed to rely on me for help and advice ever since his brain had begun to resume its normal action.

While I was puzzling over the problem of his disappearance I had wandered up-stairs, in the direction of his room, and it was more the force of habit than the expectation of making any discovery that prompted me to push the door open and enter.

Everything was in disorder, as if the occu-

pant had hurried away. A new suit that I had provided, so that he should make a good appearance when he met his relations, was missing from the closet, and also his hat and overcoat. He evidently intended acting the last part of our strange drama in his own way and without my help.

I was just turning away in a fit of sullen disappointment when a piece of paper lying by one of the legs of the table attracted my attention. I picked it up absent-mindedly and saw that it was a scrap of note-paper, bearing a monogram. I knew the initials at a glance—they were the Major's!

Now everything that had happened was easily explained. He had discovered the real Henley and carried him off as convincing evidence to Sylvia that I was unworthy of regard or consideration. The facts of the story he had probably wormed out of Mr. Fogarty or some less scrupulous resident of the court, and he was undoubtedly at this moment preparing to deal me a crushing blow, with the intention of silencing me forever. But I was pretty sure that before this Sylvia must have received my letter. She

would understand that I had made, at the last hour, an earnest effort to atone for what had been done.

I went down the stairs again, into the street, conscious that there was nothing more for me to do. My tasks were finished as far as I was concerned: the play must go on with other actors and amid other scenes.

Yet as I walked away from the foul-smelling shadows of the court a great weight of loneliness fell upon me. Where was I going?

Not home, as I had often turned from the dirty street with a buoyant heart. There was no longer a home for me. I was as homeless as yonder cur, sniffing at the garbage barrel on the corner; yet my feet *would* turn towards the dear, familiar street where Sylvia lived.

What crazy freak of my bewildered brain prompted me to haunt the ground of my lost happiness? Was I seeking fresh sorrow? Did I want to brave the contempt of these people who had once honored and respected me?

As I came in view of the familiar windows that had so often framed Sylvia's beautiful

face, smiling down a welcome as I entered the door, a strange, mad fancy came over me ; I would steal up to my room—it might be accomplished without anyone seeing me—get the picture of Sylvia from the wall, and then make my escape. How it would comfort me in after years to have that portrait always near me ! It should be my shrine of worship, a constant monitor in my fight to rise to higher things.

I slipped into the vestibule with my latchkey. Noiselessly I crossed the hall ; then I paused. I heard a step on the landing above. Clearly I could not reach my room just yet. I darted behind the curtains of the library, where I had often read aloud to Sylvia, to wait until silence was restored and I could steal on my errand again.

As I listened I heard voices in the room beyond. At first the sounds were indistinct ; as time passed I could distinguish everything.

The Major was talking. Whom to ?

From the shadow where I was crouching I could not help hearing every word he said, for only the thickness of the portière divided us from each other.

"I had reason to expect a different answer from you than this ;" and his voice was half-sullen in its tone, I thought. "When I saw you last summer you were not so unyielding ; you even gave me courage to hope, if I could wait."

How eagerly I listened to hear the answer he would receive ! for I guessed instinctively that he was addressing Sylvia, and that his speech had taken the form of a declaration.

"I can only regret, Major Carriston," she said, in a low voice, "if you interpreted anything I said in the past as an encouragement to your suit. I do not love you, and cannot be your wife."

My heart gave a glad leap. At least I had the melancholy pleasure of knowing that *he* was not the one who would triumph over my defeat.

The Major was plainly angered at her answer. He must have had serious hopes, for his voice was trembling with rage when he spoke again :

"Your feelings have undergone a change, Miss Dene, since last year, or rather since this impostor came into your house."

"Major Carriston, you forget yourself," she said, rebukingly. "You will not strengthen your position by trying to weaken that of a rival."

"Yet I repeat, this man Henley is an impostor, who has stolen into this house by mistake, and stolen something even more valuable, if I may judge by your championship. You have refused me—well and good! I can still save you from yourself by unmasking this specious scamp, who has deceived you so long and so successfully."

"I do not believe you," she said, coldly. "This attempt to poison my mind against my Cousin Henley is a last and cowardly resort of the defeated—unworthy of a soldier and a gentleman. If you have nothing else to say to me, I will leave you. I respect Mr. Henley—

"And you love him," sneeringly.

I had drawn close up to the curtains now. I could look in on them as they stood facing each other. She made a step towards the door, paused and half turned.

"Yes; since you will have me say it, I love him! Are you satisfied?"

"Not yet," he answered, harshly. "A word, and I will go. This man, on whom you have wasted your affections, is not the real Henley. He was brought here by mistake, having, perhaps, robbed your cousin to get possession of certain papers to establish his claim. The real Henley, in escaping from the hotel, suffered from a contusion that darkened his mind, and was cared for by strangers. The impostor discovered him, and has since taken every means to further impair your unfortunate cousin's reason; and now the man who wrought all this injury upon a helpless human being you tell me that you love!"

She could not have read my letter of explanation, or she would never have answered him as she did. For a moment she looked at him doubtfully, half amazed.

"What strategy of war is this, Major Carriston, that you are playing upon me? I cannot believe it—I will not!"

"You shall believe your own eyes," as she was turning away.

Then I saw him draw aside a curtain. John Henley stood before them.

"Shall I introduce you?" said the Major, ironically, "or do you still believe this is a trick of the enemy?" with biting emphasis.

"Speak! are you indeed my cousin, Jack Henley?" asked Sylvia, turning towards the bewildered face of my poor patient.

"No," he said, firmly, "my name is Heywood!"

The Major started back with a cry of amazement that covered my own exclamation. His face, so triumphant, had suddenly become pale with wonder.

"His mind is still deranged," he explained to Sylvia, who was watching them with an ironical smile on her lips.

"Think—think!" he said, twitching at Henley's sleeve. "Your name, you know, is Henley. Have you forgotten?"

"Henley?" asked the other, vacantly.

"Yes, Henley; you remember.

"Oh, yes!" with a flash of intuition. "He was the young man who watched over me all through my sickness, who has been like a brother to me ever since that terrible shock. Remember Henley! God bless him, I shall never forget him!"

The expression on the Major's face during this surprising speech I could not describe. The struggle of anger, amazement, and baffled hope expressed in his contracted features would have puzzled a physiognomist. He could not speak; his lips gave forth only mumbling, inarticulate sounds.

"You have been answered," said Sylvia, in a ringing voice. "Is there more you wish to say?—some fresh accusation against my Cousin Jack?"

He crushed down an angry exclamation that rose to his lips, and strode towards the door.

"I am through for the present. It is another damnable trick of this impostor. You will find out when it is too late that I was right in warning you."

"When the time comes I will thank you," bowing.

He picked up his hat from the chair, and, with a malignant look at Henley, strode out of the room and out of the house.

But if the Major had been a wondering listener to this conversation, what do you imagine were my sensations when I heard

Henley deny his own name? Could it be possible that the excitement of the moment had unsettled the mind I had spent so much time in nursing back to reason again? Had he indeed forgotten whom he was? It was to answer this question that I threw back the curtains and stood before them.

"What does this mean?" I said, turning my bewildered eyes towards Henley. "I happened to be in the library just now, and I could not help hearing every word that was said. What object could you have had in denying your identity?"

"What other object but to outwit your rival," he said, with a smile on his lips. "It was a slight return for your constant kindness to me while I was ill. I know who you are."

I started and turned away my head guiltily. Sylvia was seated, with her eyes fixed on the floor. Did she know, too?

"My dear boy, your masquerade has done no harm to anyone but the Major; and, after all, Sylvia may congratulate herself that she is out of his reach. For the past week I have been playing the fox myself, to find out all

about you. The Major to-day resolved on a *coup d'état*. He was to bring me here and present me to Sylvia as the real Henley, thus crushing you out forever. I followed him readily, and instead of crushing you, I succeeded in turning the tables on him completely."

"I—I can hardly believe my ears," I said, wonderingly, looking around me half stupefied. It was more than I deserved."

"Then believe your eyes," cried Henley, slapping me on the back with a hearty laugh. "Cousin Sylvia, will you not assure Mr. Heywood of the reality of this scene?" and he lounged away into the library, leaving us alone together.

She had not spoken, but there was that look in her eyes which bade me speak.

"Sylvia," I cried, kneeling at her feet, "is it true? You received those last words of mine and you have the heart to forgive me?"

"Dearest, does it matter in what name you come to me? I believe in you, for all you appeared in borrowed plumes. I, too, was a visitor at Crimmin's Rents. I have been in

communication with Jack for several days past. Together we planned to confuse the Major. He was an uncompromising enemy and one to be gotten rid of; you saw how I succeeded."

"But Henley? You were child lovers," I hinted.

"Oh, that was long ago," dropping her head prettily, while a wave of color swept over her face. "Besides, he has a wife in Australia."

"And only this morning I thought life was over for me forever," I murmured.

"The old life—yes. But the new life has just begun," she said, softly, turning her face towards me tenderly, and—

"Hem!" coughed Henley, from the next room.

THE END.

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